

DAVID ARNOT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE KING'S FOOL

THE INVISIBLE ARMY

THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

&c.

AND

GRAHAME OF CLAVER-
HOUSE

VISCOUNT DUNDEE,

1648—1689

A MILITARY BIOGRAPHY

DAVID ARNOT

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PREFACE

“WHO shall remember thee when thou art dead, and who shall pray for thee?” asks one whose written words upon the vanity of earthly glory have weathered the storms of centuries; “Death is the end of all, and man’s life suddenly passeth away like a shadow.”

Thus, sombrely exhorting his readers, the ancient sage meditated upon the piteous and pathetic fragility of the strength and intellect which, even in the vigour of triumphant joy, may be stricken, turned to dust, and buried in oblivion.

His lamentation came echoing across time and space to me, when, questing in old note books of a Scottish lawyer, eminent in the time of Charles the Second, I came haphazard upon several amazing cases, vibrating with life,—though now entirely forgotten; and even then in the late seventeenth century merely remembered for the sake of legal precedent.

Among those precedents was one which proved so haunting that it has been impossible to resist the appeal of the prisoner at the bar: devoted servant of God and man, tragically fated to live, suffer, and die three hundred years

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too early to be understood by his contemporaries.

But it is not too late for us to honour a pioneer who kept the torch alight amid gloomy and horrible fanaticism. Far from death being the end of all things, it would be more just to say that heroic nobility of spirit is inextinguishable and everlasting ; and though it for a while seem vanquished, the time must come that shall "raise it even after it is buried, and deliver it from the malignity of the age that oppressed it."

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"These are indeed great things if they be accomplished; trifles if they exist but in a promise."—*Petrarch*.

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“Like as a bird that hath beene long encaged, then chants most merrily when she gets loose into the open ayre ; Or as a sicke man, that hath wearily tossed and turned himselfe in his bed all the dull night long, is comforted at the approach of daybreake. . . . Or as a prisoner, that feeles his chaines heavie upon him, longs for releasement,—so will it be with thy Soul.”—*Henry, Earl of Manchester, “Contemplatio Mortis et Immortalitatis”* (1631).

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PROLOGUE

A.D. 1571.

DAVID ARNOT

PROLOGUE

A.D. 1571

IN the north room of Rusco Tower two dour-faced serving men were hanging the stone walls with draperies of heavy black.

The gold and crimson arras they had unhooked from its accustomed place was flung on the floor. It had been woven in Genoa; and the Laird of Rusco's pious servants, who discriminated little between Genoa and Hell, took satisfaction in dethroning it.

"Ou aye," said the elder of the two, in a hoarse croaking voice, "I mind weel when the young Laird's grandfeyther brought hame that garish stuff, in the year fifteen hundred-forty-sax; forty-sax year come Martinmas. The brawest gallant and the mightiest hunter i' the length and breadth o' Galloway. But the hand o' the Lord smote him; and it wasna twa year ere the moults were on his coffin, and his bonnie corpse was food for worms."

The younger servant groaned with an

Prologue

unctuous emphasis, "Aye, aye, Maister Gibbie ; and I jalouse his was nae faistrac end, nae mair than the auld Laird's yestreen. Ma Mither she threips there's a malison on the hoose o' Rusco, ever syne Laird Cosmo brought hame an outlandish Leddy from the Popish city o' Padua."

"Hoots, Sandy," interrupted the old man irascibly, "dinna deave me wi' yer blethers. Saxty-one year hae I been in the sairvice o' the Lairds o' Rusco,—and ma feyther and ma grandfeyther afore me,—and gin there were ony malison upon the hoose, it's me would ken it far mair truly than a doited carline like yer Mither !"

"Eh, Maister Gibbie," said the young man, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper, "Eh then, ye ken fine how Laird Cosmo,—grandfeyther that was to the auld Laird that lies deid now—ye ken weel, Maister Gibbie, o' his cantrips wi' a warlock ; ane o' thae Deevil's spawn, o' whae the Holy Writ says maist par-teeclar 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.'"

"Haud yer clatterin' tongue," said Gibbie ; "it's little ye ken o' Holy Writ, nor nigromancers neyther."

Thus admonished, Sandy worked without speaking ; but just as he was hooking up the last breadth of the grim black arras the silence was broken by a sound of footsteps descending the stone stair which led from the room in which the Laird lay dead.

These footsteps were accompanied by voices ; one assertive, sharp and raucous ; the other wheezing and lamenting ; and both descriptive of their owners.

The two servants exchanged glances as the door opened, and in stalked the Reverend Ezra McClorg, Minister of Anwoth and hereditary domestic chaplain to the Laids of Rusco.

Gaunt and angular, his face contrasted strikingly with that of the smug little man who followed in his wake, twittering forth a multiplicity of grievances.

"Ye say weel, Maister McClorg," he panted, "that oor puir Rusco was doomed by God Almighty, and sae the arts o' physie and chirurgery was a' in vain. Did I no bleed him till he swooned, according to the prescript of Hippocrates ; did I no mak for him ma famed emplastrum o' live spiders ? Wi' bleedings, scarifyings, cordials and electuaries, oilum vulpinum, dragon's blood, and aurum potable, had he no every airthly chance o' life ; for isnae the airt o' surgery now brought to sic a pitch o' pairfect knowledge and completeness that for after-ages to improve on it maun be a useless affectation ? "

Doctor Crackenthorpe sat down, overcome by his own eloquence ; "Fetch me a stoup o' wine, Gibbie ma mon," said he, "and, Sandy, dinna stand loitering."

He sighed noisily ; "Eh, eh. The Laird was oot o' his wits afore the end, and skirlin' in his

Prologue

fever he took me for a Spanish reymet o' the Inquisition. Ye should hae heerd him ca' on me for mercy frae the rack and red hot iron."

"Aye!" the Reverend McClorg exclaimed, "and noo he ca's on the Deil his maister to spare him frae the flames o' Hell!"

Doctor Crackenthorpe cleared his throat and looked up deprecatingly. "Na, na," he began; but broke off on the return of old Gibbie with a flagon of Malvoisie and two tall goblets.

Mr. McClorg was no more unwilling than his learned companion to test the quality of Rusco's cellar; he drank long and deep, and wiped his mouth before attempting to resume the conversation.

"Ou aye," he growled, "wiltu' in health and cross-grained in sickness was the Laird; and I fear young Ludovick will be juist sic anither."

The doctor groaned; the new Laird of Rusco—a vigorous and headstrong man who scorned the medical profession and enjoyed unbroken health—was not in favour with him.

"Blessed be God," said the Reverend Ezra McClorg, pouring out a second glass of Spanish wine: "Blessed be His holy will; He gies prosperity to His chosen anes, but scourges with whips and scorpions those who hate Him. In the whilk category I should place young Rusco 'tis mair charitable na to speir expressly; but gin the Lord God looks on him wi' favour, 'tis fu' strange to leave him

childless after close on sax years wedded life. And sae I said to the auld Laird. I telt him God would blast the Corsanes o' Rusco. I minded him how he langsyne haed been as young and braw as Ludovick ; and I pu'd down the mirror frae the wa', and held it sae that he could see himsel' a living skeleton. I wrastled audibly in prayer for his black sinfu' soul. But he cut me short with sic a wicked violence, sic gross profanity, that as a holy meenister o' God I cursed him for his contumacy. And sae I left him ; and he went to his account that verra hour. The Lord hath given ; the Lord hath taken awa. Blessed be the name o' the Lord."

PART ONE

“ Believe me, it requires no little confidence to promise help to the struggling, counsel to the doubtful, light to the blind, hope to the despondent, refreshment to the weary. These are indeed great things if they be accomplished ; trifles if they exist but in a promise.”—*Petrarch.*

CHAPTER I

VOX POPULI

BENEATH a translucent blue sky, one hot Spring day the town of Padua was sleeping.

The long arcaded streets—empty, deserted, steeped in silence—the tall white houses, their shutters closed against the sun, seemed to hold guard over a thousand secrets. And of all these hushed and dreamlike ways, the most tranquil, dignified and silent was the street in front of the Cavalli palace.

Suddenly across the hush came the deep reverberating note of a church clock. Once, twice, it struck. Then again there was a silence.

But the spell was broken. From the far end of the street came a tall ungainly man, walking with angular and aggressive strides, his heavy steps resounding on the cobble stones.

Red-haired, large-featured, raw-boned, he was startlingly ugly. His eyes, set close together, greenish blue beneath their short light lashes, were even more unpleasant than his long thin nose, his straight-lipped mouth, and his narrow brow. But his hands though large were shapely, and much smoother than

Vox Populi

his face, which had been roughened either by indulgence or by stress of wind and weather.

He carried gold-fringed perfumed gloves, wore garments slashed and ornamented in the latest fashion, and his velvet cap was perched sideways on his head; its jaunty angle ill according with his grim forbidding features.

It seemed as if his vivid and unquiet presence immediately aroused the town from its siesta. Beneath the cool arcades, near and far, life began to stir, and from the distance came the murmuring of voices, followed by sudden peals of laughter and the hooting shrieks of children playing at some boisterous game.

From out the shade there glided a bare-footed beggar boy, with pretty face and bright brown eyes. He danced alongside of the stranger, calling down on him the blessing of the angels, arch-angels, and the whole galaxy of saints—stretching out all the while an eager and expectant hand.

"May the blessing of the Saints in Heaven follow the most noble signor," intoned the raggamuffin in a soft persuasive voice.

But the red-haired man, ignoring this oft-repeated benediction, stood still in front of the gateway of the Cavalli Palace.

The gate, invitingly open, disclosed a cool spacious courtyard, where fountains tinkled amidst scented masses of exotic flowers, and marble nymphs and gods gleamed from a setting of dark ilex, cypress, and clipped box.

Mr. Mungo McKerlie was horrified by the white beauty of the statues. The human form appeared to him most scandalously pagan. He stood there, scowlingly regarding a graceful Mercury; "Maister Knox would deal with this," he muttered; "Gladly would he hurl the Roman idol crashing to the ground."

Meanwhile a sleek black kitten, which had been dozing in the courtyard, opened its large green eyes and looked inquiringly up at the ill-favoured stranger.

Now it chanced that Mungo McKerlie, Younger of Marbrack, though he had witnessed cheerfully the burning of a witch in Edinburgh, and had watched with coldly scientific interest a criminal in Provence being torn asunder by wild horses, was physically fluttered and nauseated by the mere presence of a cat.

The kitten, as if becoming conscious of this loathing, arched its back, dilated the dark pupils of its gleaming eyes, and then dashed out and ran swiftly down the street.

At the far end of the piazza, a group of children were laughing, wrangling, and joking; the curly-headed beggar-boy conspicuous amongst them.

The kitten paused a moment. One of the girls snatched at it; but with a dexterous wriggle it evaded her grasp and turned to run back to its former quarters. As it passed McKerlie, he kicked it with a sudden vehemence that drew from the hapless little beast a

Vox Populi

discordant squeal of terror. The children came rushing up, one brandishing a stick, another poising a stone to hit the kitten but keep clear of the harsh-featured stranger.

McKerlie, who had walked on a pace or two, stood still again. His thin lips parted in a smile and showed a row of large white teeth which gave to his appearance a touch of something wolf-like and ferocious.

So intent was he upon the writhings, strugglings and spittings of the kitten that he failed to observe a young man in the dark robe of a student, walking in the shade, and reading as he walked.

The kitten, ringed round by impish tormentors, raised piteous cries; and the student, coming nearer, looked up from his book.

No sooner did he see the frightened animal and the triumphant jeering group of children, than his eyes flashed and his strong young face paled with anger. He strode out into the sunshine, inadvertently jostling the gorgeously-clad stranger; and with a slender hand but firm grip he imprisoned the arm of the boy whose stick was in act of descending again upon the kitten.

Mr. Mungo McKerlie scowled. The man in the student's gown recalled to him the grace, the liveness, and the mingled strength and beauty of the Mercury in the Cavalli Palace courtyard.

The mere presence of this masterful young

man produced immediate effect upon the children; their shouts and laughter hushed in an instant, they stood motionless and quiet.

McKerlie who had seen the world, and who had witnessed war in the Low Countries, was unwillingly reminded of the way in which a body of mutineers had fallen silent in the presence of a certain famous General.

"My good sir," he said, "why do you check the healthy instinct of the children, and deprive me of an innocent diversion?"

He spoke Italian; but the student, after one rapid glance, replied in English: "If to torment the weak and helpless be your notion of innocence and health, you and I fight on opposing sides."

McKerlie frowned; then showed his teeth in an unpleasant smile. "So ye're nae damned Italian," he said, "but—unless ma ear deceives me—a Scot juist like masel!"

The young man had picked up the kitten; and now held it gently in his arms, a fold of his long hanging sleeve enwrapping its trembling body.

"A Scot," he said, "but not like you."

And he turned his back and walked away, the children gazing after him.

McKerlie, who at home was heir to a new peerage and an old estate, was little used to being thwarted or disdained. This countryman of his had roused in him that mysterious

delight, and they saluted the stranger as "Il Magnifico."

Again he smiled malevolently: "'Tis the manifest plain truth," he said, "the voice of the people is the voice of God. Amen."

CHAPTER II

MASTER AND PUPIL

THE long hot day drew to an end ; the shadows lengthened ; and, almost before the daylight waned, the moon had risen.

Upon the double walls which surrounded Padua, upon the ditches without and the arcaded streets within, upon the palaces and churches, the piazzas and the stately courtyards, the moonlight shed its silver radiance, so that the ancient city seemed no more the dwelling place of sinful mankind, but a dream-vision of surpassing beauty.

The hours swiftly winged towards midnight.

Standing at a window in the Cavalli Palace, looking out upon the glorious night and gazing up towards the clear sky, the student David Arnot repeated to himself the mysterious alluring saying he had just read in the Greek of Plotinus :

“ If it is not for those to speak of the beautiful things of the world who have never seen them, never felt them beautiful, much more must men be silent who have not yet

known the beauty of the Inner Vision, more exquisite than starlight, moonlight, or the summer dawn.

“This vision comes to those who see with the soul’s sight; and when at last they see, then awe will fall upon them, and deep wonderment and yearning. For the Unseen Beauty is divine, and wakens longing greater a hundredfold than can be felt for beauty visible and mortal.”

These words revealed to David Arnot how far he was from wisdom or contentment. Yet he—most favoured pupil of the renowned philosopher and sage Ilario Cavalli—had progressed from one intellectual triumph to another, until his fellow students grew to look upon him with awestruck wonder or bitter envy according to their natures.

Nine years bypast, he had come to Padua alone and friendless. Now it was whispered that upon him would descend the mantle of Ilario Cavalli. So brilliant his achievements, so unbroken his good fortune, so fair his prospects of fame for noble service to the cause of learning, that an eager hopefulness had carried him forward, with boundless energy and a vigour before which nearly every obstacle gave way.

But on this beautiful still night a shadow of dim apprehension fell upon him. In some incomprehensible and yet insistent fashion it

Master and Pupil

seemed to emanate from the red-headed Scotsman who had roused his indignation in the morning. Several times during the day the wolflike face with sinister greenish eyes had come between him and his book, and he had found himself speculating uneasily as to the influence on the world of such a character. The man had seemed the very incarnation of crude ignorance, fanaticism, malice, and a certain brutal arrogance; and never had Arnot, in all his experience and observation, felt such marked repugnance from any living creature as he felt from this unknown Caledonian, whom in all human probability he would never see again.

As he looked out into the starlit night, trying to erase the stranger's image from memory, a door swung open, and in its archway stood the venerable Messer Ilario Cavalli, carrying an Eastern lamp which cast a steady light on his thin ascetic face, tranquil with the inscrutable calm of dignified old age.

As the master stood there, motionless and silent, Arnot felt his presence and turned to welcome him.

Cavali came forward slowly; placed the lamp upon a cabinet of ebony and ivory, and gazed upon his pupil with eyes which were at the same moment tolerant and searching.

Arnot stayed near the window, whence the moonlight streamed upon his strong young

figure ; but his face was in shadow as he turned towards the master.

The venerable doctor seated himself in a large high-backed chair with an embroidered canopy. He rested his parchment-coloured hands upon the sides of the throne-like chair, and then he spoke.

"Your mind is no longer the unruffled sea which mirrors in its depths the glory of the heavens. It is as an ocean which begins to heave with presage of coming storm. Have I not taught you that to reflect the highest wisdom man's soul must be serene and tranquil?"

David came forward into the room, and stood where the lamp shone upon him.

"Master," he said, "I have read in Plotinus of that divine and perfect beauty which no mortal words can paint ; and straightway there flashed before me no image of this transcendent loveliness, but the ungainly person of that Scotsman with whom I had angry words this morning. It was he who goaded the children to cry out upon me as a necromancer ; and I fear that in my country there are many like him, even among those who sit in the seats of Judgment and hold in their hands the lives and fortunes of men."

"Not only in your country," said Cavalli, "but here, everywhere, are many who set themselves in opposition to the few who live to combat misery and folly. If you fear to be

Master and Pupil

called 'necromancer,' you must renounce the art of healing, and must turn your back on science. The ignorant are ever ready to brand as 'magic' any knowledge of the higher life and nature's secrets.

"You dream of regenerating the world ; but the world is not yet ripe for wisdom ; and so not even to you will I transmit the whole of the vast knowledge I have toiled to attain. I could describe to you the secret of making ships to dive below the ocean, messages to pass a thousand miles without a written line or a spoken word. All this and much more could I teach you. But what would you profit thereby ? Would the world acclaim you a discoverer, a pioneer, a benefactor ? Nay, you would be execrated, haled to prison, tried, and burnt for trafficking with the Devil."

"But if I healed the sick, brought hope to the hopeless, strength to the weak, and happiness to the despairing," said David, "surely I would be loved and honoured."

Cavalli sighed. "Believe me, you will be worse than foolish if you count on the wind of human gratitude to fill your sails."

David looked at him, perplexed :

"How strange that you should speak thus, Master ; you whose fame has been sounded out far and wide with the general voice."

"If I were poor, obscure, and unable to protect myself," replied the doctor, "I should be spat upon as a heretic, hounded down and

hunted as an outcast ; mocked and derided. But because I come of a princely house, noted for holding its conquests with a strong arm, because I have wealth and worldly power, I may even presume to cure what the apothecaries term ‘incurable’ diseases ! ”

David’s sense of apprehension deepened ; never before had his benevolent master, the embodiment of wise serenity, spoken thus bitterly.

“ The time has come,” said Messer Cavalli, “ when you need to strip yourself of all illusions. If you cling to one such weakness you are no true follower of Wisdom ; nor, if you cherish these cravings for applause or for gratitude, are you qualified to learn the lessons I would teach. To achieve the highest greatness you must give all, while asking nothing. Spirit, soul and body you must toil and strive, and lavish your very heart, without hoping that the world will understand or value your service. You must be stronger than the mightiest warrior, more pitiful and tender than the most tenderly loving woman ; and yet you must not yearn for fame or glory. More difficult yet,—never may you give harbourage to hatred ; not even towards the vilest. Do you promise to observe these laws ? ”

David put his hand out in an appealing gesture. “ All I dare to say—ere I be tested—is that I will strive faithfully to follow in your footsteps. And if I stumble, may God forgive,

Master and Pupil

and grant me the strength to redeem and expiate my failure."

"Nay," said Cavalli, "not yet do you comprehend how I would have you fit to be the instrument of a Power compared to which mine own is but as a rushlight before the radiance of the sun. Rest now, and sleep. To-morrow you shall make choice affecting all your future. Saint Michael grant you to choose wisely."

CHAPTER III

THE CHOICE

It was not till noon that Messer Ilario Cavalli sent for his favourite pupil ; and when David came into the presence of the Master, he thought that the old man looked spent and weary. But it seemed as if this weariness were in a moment swept away as soon as Cavalli spoke.

“The time has come for you to make the decision on which your future must be built. Nor is it for me to counsel ; I would have you set your course in the clear light of your own conscience.”

David bowed his head, and remained standing close to the eastern window bathed in golden sunshine.

Cavalli, in the same dispassionate yet ringing tones, continued :

“Of all men now living, you are the one most near to me in mind and spirit. There is between us a subtler kinship than that of blood ; and if I made you heir to my material wealth, and nearly all my hard-won knowledge, you would never disappoint me.”

David paled with emotion. “Oh, my

The Choice

beloved Master," he exclaimed, "what am I that you should give me so much honour? It is your own generous heart; not my desert."

His voice faltered. There was deep silence within the room; but he could hear the plashing of the fountain in the courtyard below, and the shrill cry of a child in the street beyond.

Then, in an instant, the shriek of the child brought back the scene of yester morning; and the unquiet presence of the harsh-tongued Scotsman seemed suddenly projected into the calm of the Cavalli Palace. Even in the glowing sunshine, David felt a peculiar shrinking, an unaccountable dread.

The noise in the street died away; within the room the silence deepened; and in this silence it seemed as if a door opened into regions of darkness and misery, of suffering bodies and imprisoned spirits.

Cavalli, reading his thoughts, put them for him into words.

"If I make you my heir," he said, "if I rely upon you to continue my work after I leave this world, it means you must dwell as I have done in Padua. You muse, peradventure, on a return to Scotland; but verily there are bounds to what one soul caged in flesh and blood can hope to accomplish. To carry the torch to Scotland would be work for a lifetime. You could not achieve victory among your own countrymen with half your mind in

Padua. Nor should you step into my place if your heartstrings are to be ever pulling you towards Scotland."

Again a silence; but this time David felt the silence throb and quiver.

"Scotland or Padua? Which calls you? Warrior of Christ, I stand aside that you may listen for the voice of the Supreme Commander."

David saw with piercing distinctness the great and congenial career which opened before him in Padua. The wide powers, the prestige, the beauty of it, allured him; while the mere name of Scotland brought back to him a most forlorn boyhood: an atmosphere of leaden gloom and dreary greyness; the darker contrasted with the lavish sunshine of this bright Italian noon.

He recalled, against his will, the most frightful scene he had ever been forced to witness; the burning of a so-called witch, a poor old woman who had brewed decoctions for healing quartan fevers, toothache, rheumatic pains and other suchlike common ills.

Who accused her, how she had been dragged to trial, who condemned her, was forgotten; for David had been scarcely four years old at the time. But her ashen-grey face, her trembling body, her wild despairing shriek of protest against the cruelty of the world; her frantic appeal to God; and the exultant response of a minister standing by, who told her that as she

The Choice

burnt on earth so would she burn for ever in Hell,—all this rose up before him as if it were happening again that very moment.

His decision was made with characteristic swiftness.

“Forgive me, my dear and noble Master,” he said; “I must now and for ever refuse your splendid generosity. I may not desert my own unhappy people. Yet to seem ungrateful, to say I must forego all the delight and the high honour of the heritage you proffer, this pierces me with more grief than I can set forth in words. But the way is clear. My own country calls me.”

David’s face grew rigid from stress of feeling, and this rigidity accentuated his likeness to one of the Roman statues in the courtyard.

But though his face seemed turned to marble, his eyes shone with the light of a great purpose.

“Pause and think,” said his Master. “You renounce dignity for obscurity; riches for poverty; you divest yourself of advantages which you will never regain. Here you are known and esteemed. Here, as my chosen successor, honour and renown are certain. To return to Scotland is to cast off every external aid. You would go as a torch to lighten the darkness? But there are those awaiting you who assuredly will strive to extinguish the light. Envy, hate, blind ignorance,—these be more potent than you measure. Dare you,

David Arnot

single-handed, challenge the age-long Powers of Darkness?"

"God helping me," said David,—“armed with your blessing,—Master, I dare.”

PART TWO

“Faine would Man be happie while he lives.”—Henry, *Earl of Manchester*, “*Contemplatio Mortis et Immortalitatis*” (1631).

CHAPTER IV

CORSANE OF RUSCO

ONE evening, some nine months after David Arnot had left Padua for his native country, Messer Ilario Cavalli was meditating upon the works of Plato, when he heard a knocking, respectful but persistent.

He closed the precious volume. "Enter," he said resignedly ; and in came his confidential servant, Gian Gaetano.

"Most Excellent Master, a nobleman from Scotland craves a word with the illustrious doctor. He has come here expressly to be healed. If he is sent away he will but walk into his grave."

"I will see him now," said the doctor. But it was some moments before the door reopened, and the stranger, ushered by Gian, advanced slowly into the room.

He was a tall man, large-limbed, broad-shouldered, young, and modishly attired. The magnificence of his dress, as if for a gala or a banquet, contrasted strangely with the desperate misery of his face, a face handsome in features, but so drawn with pain and weariness it was distressing to see.

Corsane of Rusco

Doctor Cavalli dismissed his servant by a gesture, motioned the stranger to a seat, and bent on him a gaze kind and yet scrutinising.

"Permit me, Illustrious Signor, to present myself," said the young man: "Ludovick Corsane of Rusco in Scotland, sprung in time long bypast from the great house of Corsini."

The doctor bowed, and spoke a few words of welcome; whereupon Rusco, in faltering Italian eked out with French and Latin, struggled to state his case.

The effort seemed to harass and exhaust him.

"Will you not let me hear the English tongue?" said Doctor Cavalli; and his patient sighed gratefully.

"I have come," he said, "in search of that health which Scottish doctors tell me is lost beyond hope of recovery. If any man in Christendom can heal me, I am assured it is you. But if you cannot aid me, I pray the end come soon. Better to die now and have done, than to drag out a living death."

"That must be as God wills," said the physician, sternly yet gently.

Rusco's hand clenched by his side. "I know not why I should be doomed to suffer. I have kept God's commandments; yet He scourges me; while others who break His laws, and wrap themselves in wrong like a robe, go free, nay flourish!"

"Since when have you been smitten with this sickness?" asked Cavalli.

"'Tis not a twelvemonth since it gripped me ; but its progress has been rapid. Some such mysterious disease killed my father and my grandfather. My father showed no sign of it till he was close on fifty ; but my hapless grandfather was struck down, even as I, in all the vigour of his manhood ; and he died before his six-and-twentieth birthday."

"And your great-grandfather," said Cavalli, "was that Cosimo Corsane who spent his youth in Padua and Florence and Bologna, seeking to master the foul arts of necromancy ; winning to himself an ill renown no less for arrogance and lust and prodigality than for black magic and defiance of the laws of God."

"How know you this ?" asked Ludovick Corsane, considerably startled.

Doctor Cavalli waved the question aside. "Your ancestor," he said, "sinned often and grievously ; but most of all against his wife the Lady Mariota."

Ludovick flushed up to the roots of his hair : "I too," he said, "have a wife. It is for her that I beseech you to restore me to the health and strength which are man's birthright. How can she love me while I am thus weak and broken ? She is young and beautiful,—beautiful beyond all power of words to tell or art to shadow forth. I would that you could see her ; then you would understand."

"Tell me of your Lady," said Cavalli.

Corsane of Rusco

“She is my cousin ; our fathers, while we were infants, destined us to wed. When we were children I called her my little wife and loved her after the fashion of a child. In manhood I have loved no other.”

He broke off with an impatient gesture ; then with an evident effort, spoke again. “Believe me, although I have so good right to love her,—I, her husband whom she willingly wedded,—there have been days and hours when I have loved her more than it is wise to love a human creature. She is bewitching, exquisite ; not even the heathen Venus can have been more utterly enchanting.”

He sighed : “I have had it in my heart to wish that I could see her ill, sad, and suffering, if only that I might give to her the tenderness and sweet compassion she knows not how to bestow on me. She tires of me in my sickness. And in verity I am full weary of the Scottish doctors. ‘Bleed the patient till he swoons,’ they say, and quote Hippocrates or Galen.”

“I commend,” said Doctor Cavalli, “your estimate of the complete art of chirurgery as commonly practised in your native country. But even in Scotland there is one who learnt his art in Padua ; and so, no matter what pangs your soul may suffer by decree of heaven, your body need no longer be prey to ignorant physicians.”

Rusco looked at him intently. “You say no matter what pangs my soul may suffer.

What know you of souls? A doctor's task is with the bodies of his patients. How can he pierce through flesh to spirit? How solve the problems over which divines and theologians have persecuted, slain, and burnt each other ever since the earliest ages?"

"Man," said Doctor Cavalli, "is a threefold being; he is mortal, angel, and animal. Worse than blind are those poor fools, miscalled physicians, who treat him but as the beasts that perish."

"Scarcely can I believe you are indeed a doctor," commented Rusco with unconscious irony.

Messer Ilario Cavalli smiled. Then gravely he said, "Dismiss from memory the jargon you have heard prated by those who light the Temple of Knowledge with the lamp of the apothecary. Were Divine Wisdom herself to appear to them, they would dispute what drug to give her, or whether she should be bled or scarified. Forget them; and hold in your mind the thought that the spirit is master, imagination the tool, and the body the plastic material."

"You speak like an alchemist," said Rusco. "Can you, by looking on me, tell how I am ill, and wherefore?"

"You are in pain of body," said the doctor, "but worse yet is your unrest of mind; desire and fear incessantly contesting for the mastery."

"How know you?" asked Rusco; but he

Corsane of Rusco

did not await an answer. "Truly," he said, "I am unhappy; and most unhappy in that my marriage has been barren. This was the grief which preyed upon my mind long ere I suffered any pain of body; and I am haunted by a deepening dread that I shall go childless to the grave, the last of my race. Could you but exorcise this fear——."

Doctor Cavalli opened one of the vellum-covered books in front of him. "Hearken," he said. "Hear the comfortable words of Paracelsus: 'The true physician must understand the regeneration of man; the purification of the body, mind, and will; and the ennobling of all the faculties of the soul.' Even in your own country there is such a wise physician; and to him I shall commend you. Cast away doubt and fear. Too long you have allowed these tyrants to imprison your soul."

CHAPTER V

A HAPPY LIFE

CLOSE on a year had passed since David Arnot landed again in Scotland ; and, during this entire time, he had so prospered that the tragic warnings of the Paduan sage receded further and further into the dim recesses of memory.

He had come from Italy prepared for strife and bitterness, for contumely and ridicule and dogged opposition ; but to his astonishment his difficulties had been smoothed away as if by some invisible power. His reputation as a doctor had been made with what appeared marvellous rapidity. What mattered that physicians criticised his methods and belittled his successes ? His patients judged him by results ; and these in nearly every case had bettered his best hopes.

His most signal triumph was a cure wrought on the Earl of Menteith and the Isles ; a generous nobleman who showed his gratitude by putting into Arnot's hand a purse of gold, and by conferring on him permission to live in the deserted Priory of Inchmahome. This latter benefit was Arnot's own especial choice.

A Happy Life

The lonely desolated Priory, situated on the most beautiful of the fair Islands of Menteith, attracted him as a peaceful haven in which to meditate and study, during such periods as he might justifiably retreat from the ceaseless turmoil of old Edinburgh, with all its warring interests of contending factions, acrimonious lawsuits, and excommunicatory thunders from the pulpits of self-appointed saints.

In the empty room which had once been the monastic library, Arnot arranged his few precious books, built up a fire of logs on the long-forsaken hearth, scattered the floor with newly-gathered rushes, and felt at last he had come home.

His days and nights of study were varied by expeditions over the mountains into the wild Highland country. There he was no less warmly welcomed for his skill as a musician than for his healing arts. Bard, surgeon, philosopher, his talents won cordial greeting from the hospitable Chiefs and clansmen.

He had in a supreme degree the power to radiate harmony, and he was ready to minister to minds diseased as well as bind up wounds and drive out fevers.

One night at Inchmahome, when, as it were, he stood aloof from his own self and tried to estimate his various achievements, he marvelled at the cures he had wrought,—marvelled not in any spirit of arrogance or self-complacence, but in astonishment, humility, and gratitude.

“Nature has appointed us men to be no base ignoble animals ; for when she ushers us into life and into the vast universe as into some great assembly,—to be spectators of the mighty whole, and keenest aspirants for honour,—forthwith she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatsoever is elevated and more divine than we. Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation which rise up within the mind and heart of man.”

So far had Arnot progressed in the translation he was making into English from Longinus on the Sublime ; and as he copied this inspiring sentence from his well-worn book into the silver-clasped and vellum-covered volume which was meant to enshrine the finished work, he paused in an access of satisfaction that it had been granted him to recognise the mighty possibilities of man’s life here and hereafter.

Suddenly the trancelike stillness of the night was broken by the low hooting of an owl, which flitted past the window, raised its mournful voice again, and vanished.

But scarcely had Arnot dipped his quill into the ink, intending to continue his congenial task, when the sound of oars cutting their way across the starlit waters, smote upon his hearing.

Hastily he locked his precious book into an

A Happy Life

aumbry, and, opening the door, went out to meet the unbidden visitor.

For the moment he saw no human form ; but, as he looked across the expanse of waters and over towards the mountains looming dark against the brilliant canopy of the sky, he again heard the owl's dismal hoot ; a cry, it seemed, of mockery or warning ; and, though he had no reasonable cause for apprehension, he felt a sudden icy chill and an instinctive shrinking.

Then from the ancient Spanish chestnuts by the water's edge, there came a tall man, leaning one hand on a stick and resting the other on the shoulder of a servant.

The stranger's head had been bowed down, but even when he raised it with a sudden irritable movement, his face was still in shadow.

"Who may you be ?" he said to Arnot, in a haughty peremptory tone.

"David Arnot, Chirurgeon and Physician, at your commandment," replied David ; but he answered coldly, still affected by the unaccountable foreboding which had smitten him a moment since.

"You !" exclaimed the stranger. "You ? But you are young."

And David's coldness vanished ; for as the man came beyond the shadow of the trees, and stepped out into the starlight, he revealed a face so gaunt and painracked that David's momentary hesitation was swept away in a flood of compassion.

David Arnot

The stranger seemed to feel this, and his sunken eyes gleamed brightly. He withdrew his grasp then from the servant's shoulder.

"I come to you," he said, "from the great Paduan Ilario Cavalli. Cure me, doctor; cure me; and I will believe that miracles are yet wrought on earth."

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY OF RUSCO

IN the banquet hall at Rusco Castle, where funereal draperies of rusty black had erstwhile added to the gloom, now shone that gold and crimson Genoese brocade, the foreign sumptuousness of which had scandalised old Gibbie.

Close to the fire there stood a tall wiry man, whose bright blue eyes and shrewd face expressed the energy, vitality and vigour which—with his learning, wit, and stern persistence—had won him the post of President of the Court of Session.

Peter McKerlie, Lord Marbrack, was little accustomed to be kept waiting, and it was now precisely half an hour since he had ridden up to Rusco Castle and sent word to Lady Rusco that he wished to speak with her. His patience coming to an end, he fell to stalking up and down, working himself into a state of righteous indignation over the fecklessness of all woman-kind.

But when the door swung open, his irritation vanished in the presence of the charming culprit.

Clad from head to foot in black Segovian velvet, this black bespoke no hint of mourning. Rather it seemed to emphasise the whiteness of her skin, the sparkle of her hazel eyes, and the inimitable grace of a most faultless figure. So bright her auburn hair, it vied with the ruddy gold of the flames leaping and curvetting on the hearth.

Lord Marbrack, though he had seen her countless times in all the brilliance of her vivid beauty, could not but be anew impressed.

Leisurely yet swiftly she advanced into the room.

"Dear Lord and Cousin, you know that you are always welcome."

Her voice was gentle, and caressing; and Marbrack's stern judicial face relaxed into a smile.

"When I hae but forty minutes' time to spare, ye keep me dangling here while I waste thirty o' them," he said grumbling; "but I'll no complain; I'm only here to learn what news ye hae o' Ludovick?"

"Ludovick," said Lady Rusco, "should be home ere sunset, bringing with him another of these Scots physicians, who has vowed to cure him."

"Eh, eh," growled Lord Marbrack, "each ane believes himsel' a new Hippocrates; but for ma ain part I trust Nature better than I trust physeecians."

"I too," she owned, sinking on to a seat in

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the embrasure of the southern window. "And, truth to tell, I am not over pleased that I shall have this dreary old physician living in the castle. Would Ludovick but rouse himself, and cease to brood on his pains, 'twould be far better for him than this chasing after doctors."

"Nae doot o' that, Mariota," said Lord Marbrack, with the conscious virtue of a man in perfect health.

Lady Rusco rose and came over towards her formidable kinsman.

"Good Cousin," she said coaxingly, "if my temper cannot brook the presence of this plaguey doctor, may I not send for you; to use your best endeavours with Ludovick that he eschew his follies and emplastrums. Truly I should be ill myself if I drank physic as he does, and was let blood each seven-night."

"Ma Leddy," said Lord Marbrack, "I'm juist afeard that Ludovick is like his feyther; and ye'l find he gangs his ain gait. But keep a gude hairt, and send for me if this fule doctor fashes ye beyond endurance. And noo I must gang awa'. I did but ca' to learn news o' Ludovick. It's little time I hae for havoring wi' bonnie leddies,—even tho' they be ma kith an' kin."

Lady Rusco smiled: "A stirrup-cup before you go?"

"Aye," replied Lord Marbrack. "Let it

be Ludovick's Spanish wine from Malaga, and I'll drink confusion to this doctor ! ”

“ Amen, with all my heart,” said Mariota, laughing. “ Yea, my Lord President of the Court of Session, I shall lodge an accusation, like as not, against this doctor, for attempted poisoning of Ludovick. No doubt the mountebank will plead ‘ not guilty ’ ; but an’ I be jury I promise you there shall be little doubt upon the verdict ! ”

Lord Marbrack looked at her questioningly. “ Ye dinna ken the doctor,” he said, “ and wummanlike ye damn him at a venture.”

“ Assuredly,” said Mariota calmly ; “ I need not see him. I know these men of science ; a solemn face, a croaking voice, a rusty beard, and a fulsome manner. He will talk Latin all the day ; but he must prate to himself alone, unless I call old Crackenthorpe to bandy words with him. He will be the sixth physician Ludovick has brought here. They are all as one ; all elderly, opinionated, most contentious and irascible ; and all misliking me ! ”

“ Commend me to a wumman for a guid hater,” said Lord Marbrack.

Mariota laughed ; and she was still smiling when she looked out of the window to wave farewell to her distinguished kinsman, as he rode away on a heavy Flemish mare attended by a retinue of servants.

He was soon lost to sight ; but Lady Rusco loitered by the window, looking out on the

The Lady of Rusco

clear tranquil day, taking the same pleasure in the colours of the scene as in the jewels of a pendant or the embroidery of a robe for her adornment. The heather-covered hills loomed dark against a sky of turquoise flecked with white clouds; the river glittered steel-grey like a sword-blade; and though the sharpness of the air, no less than the reddening berries of the hawthorn, spoke of autumn, the beauty of the scene was such as summer scarcely could rival.

As Lady Rusco stood watching and waiting, the sky paled gradually, and then glowed into a crimson splendour as the sun was sinking.

At last from out the distant shadows a cavalcade emerged; and Mariota descried her husband, riding with loose rein beside the river.

After six months' absence she scrutinised him critically; he was too tall to look his best on horseback, and he stooped ungracefully. But beside him on a Spanish jennet rode a stranger, who attracted her immediate notice, and who seemed familiar though she could not recall where or when she had seen any man like him. He appeared about the age of Ludovick, younger perhaps; and yet on second glance she thought he must be older; for with the suppleness and vigour of youth he combined the finished ease of maturity.

Lady Rusco descended to give greeting to

the travellers ; and as she came out to the main door, her husband, dismounting stiffly yet in an eager haste, walked up to her with both hands outstretched ; his face flushing.

" Ah, Ludovick," she said airily, as if she had parted from him only a few hours since.

But he clasped her hands and held them tightly.

" Are you happy to see me ? " he murmured under his breath ; and then he kissed her.

" Truly I am," smiled Lady Rusco. " But will you not present your guest ? "

Rusco started, and released her hands.

" You do well to chide me. In the delight of seeing you I forget all else. But now I would have you greet my good friend David Arnot."

The stranger dismounted, and bowed in silence.

Lady Rusco swept him a deep curtsy, and her eyes met his. They were grey eyes, the most penetrating she had ever seen ; and for an instant it was as if they looked into her soul and judged it with a calm impartial judgment.

She was provoked. Admiration, hearty and unqualified, was what her husband had habituated her to take as her just right. The stranger's glance embarrassed her, so that her words of greeting died on her lips. She

The Lady of Rusco

turned instead to Ludovick. "But," she asked, "where is the doctor?"

Ludovick broke into a laugh: "Here is the doctor," he said, bringing his hand down heavily upon the shoulder of the man beside him. "Doctor David Arnot; and he merits a most hearty welcome."

Then Arnot smiled, a spontaneous sympathetic smile, which lighted up his face and banished from it that austerity which a moment ago had irritated Mariota.

"Rusco has warned me," he said, "that you, my Lady, would fain wipe out the entire race of doctors and chirurgeons. But I plead in my defence that I come here to heal, and not to torture; so I pray to be exempted from your condemnation."

The words were deferential, but the manner easy. And Lady Rusco, accustomed to detect a note of cringing in the self-assertiveness of all physicians, wondered to find this doctor so unlike his brethren.

"Sir," she said smiling, "'twere churlish not to bid you welcome; but if you win my confidence you will in truth be the first one of your calling who can boast as much."

The doctor, far from being disconcerted, looked at her with quick approval.

"Madam," he said, "I doubt not that when you condemn there must be justice in the condemnation."

David Arnot

Mariota smiled again, this time in genuine amusement.

Her husband, watching her, said to himself that never had she looked handsomer : " Ah," he sighed contentedly, " how good it is to have come home. Now I am happy."

CHAPTER VII

A MIRACLE

MARIOTA, Lady of Rusco, stood in the deep embrasure of her window.

It was a calm night of stars ; there was not a breath of wind ; not a leaf stirring ; not even the hoot of an owl to break the stillness.

Beside her Ludovick was leaning against the wall. He looked at her, not at the sky.

The light of the many candles within the room, the brightness of the stars outside, the tranquillity of the night, and his new and vivid hope of health combined to cast over him a spell of peace and delight.

His wife appeared to him more beautiful than ever ; and he thought he detected in her some signs of tenderness for himself.

The dormant possibility of a great love seemed to have wakened in Mariota. She was less languorous, less careless, more gracious, more responsive than erstwhile.

Yet as she looked out at the sky, he wondered how much place he had in her thoughts.

Suddenly she seemed far away from him. But he assured himself that her innocent young soul was soaring into regions where his more

earthly nature could not follow. He gazed at her as if she were some angelic vision ; and deep from his heart there rose an intense longing for love bright as the stars and immutable as eternity. He felt as if for such a love he could have suffered a thousand torments, died a thousand deaths.

Then a twinge of violent bodily pain brought him back to the present.

Mariota turned to him. " You are weary," she said, more sympathetically than had been her habit ; " but, for your pleasure, know I retract my every execration of your doctor."

Ludovick's thin face flushed. " Sweet Love," he said, " I am rejoiced that you approve him ; and you will not rail at me if I tell you I could not trust him more entirely were he my own brother. Never have I known a mind noble as his ; he has the vigour of a soldier, the wisdom of a sage, the manners of a courtier, the graces of a poet. He can soothe me when I am angry, inspire me when I am weary, divert me from pain ; and give me hope to rise above all weakness."

Mariota smiled. " In sooth," she said, " almost I could be jealous of your phoenix of physicians ! "

Then Ludovick swept her into his arms with sudden vehement passion. " Oh, my Love," he said, " my own, my only Love."

A Miracle

Next morning the Laird of Rusco, instead of being prostrate with fatigue after the journey of the five previous days, wakened refreshed. He gave orders for his two favourite horses to be saddled at ten of the clock, as he and Doctor Arnot would ride to the shore.

Accordingly they started, the sun smiling upon them, and a gentle breeze blowing fleecy clouds across a welcoming blue sky.

For some minutes they rode silently. It was Ludovick who spoke first, drawing rein after a canter on the sands.

He pointed over the sea with his riding whip. "Look," he said, "yonder is Ireland. They say that the folk of Galloway and Hibernia were all of the same race in pagan times, and worshipped the same gods, and trembled under the same frightful magic. Right glad am I to live in the present happier times, and not in that remote past, black with tragedies. Fain would I be happy ; and since the night I saw you first, that night at Inchmahome, I am become so hopeful, so renewed, that bodily pain no longer has the power to cut into my mind. I would you had been my brother ; for, indeed, I could not prize you more were you my nearest in blood. You dragged me back from the brink of the grave. To the end of time I shall be grateful."

David's face lighted up with pleasure, for if Rusco felt drawn to him, so he also had felt—except in the first moment of unaccountable

coldness—a marked attraction to Rusco. Even in Rusco's most irritable moods, even when he raged under physical pain, or sank into the grip of dark depression, there remained always in him some indefinable appeal which went to David's heart and drew out a tenderness more like the love of a mother for a dear but headstrong son than like a man's affection for his fellow. And yet there was scarcely a year of difference in their ages.

"David," said Rusco suddenly, "you will not scoff at me, nor liken me to a woman with the vapours, if I tell you that until I knew you I used to be dogged and hunted by multitudes of fears. But fear cannot live in your presence ; and you have ministered to a wounded spirit as well as to a tormented body."

David paused a moment before replying ; and then he said, "As man is a triple being—spirit, soul and body—no physician can heal him, no friend can aid him, who thinks only of the body."

Ludovick's horse began to kick and champ ; he patted it and rebuked it gently ; and then, when it was quiet, after an instant's hesitation he spoke again.

"You know—I have told you the story of my life—how although I have the right to claim the love of my own Lady, yet I ever seek as a lover to win it afresh. But in my sickness I grew full of dismal humours and miserable forebodings ; and though I seldom spake

A Miracle

them in words, yet I suspect she felt them ; for she shrank from me. She is made for gaiety, joy, peace ; a serene untroubled life."

David smiled and sighed. "Can you ensure for her such a life ? Scarcely before you return to Paradise, whence our souls have come ?"

"You deem our souls came from on high," said Ludovick. "You will appal my chaplain, who tells us, with ferocious emphasis, that we all are miserable sinners, vile and degraded. Truth to tell, my Lady and I grow weary of these Sunday scoldings. McClorg repeats till I am angered, and then repeats again, that my sickness comes from God, a punishment for ancestral sins."

"When Christ came to earth," said David, "He did not give diseases ; He expelled them."

Ludovick meditated. "You think, then," he said, "that pain and sickness are of the Devil."

"I think," said David, "that pain, sin, sickness—all the ills of life—have their roots deep in the past. It is beyond my skill to see or declare whence they came. But of one thing I am assured ; in the age-long struggle between Light and Darkness, even though Darkness for a while may seem to brood over this world, and Light flash out only in gleams, yet are the powers of Darkness the weaker. Lust, cruelty, hatred, jealousy, treachery, have only behind them the power of mutinous Satan :

while honour, loyalty and valour, heroic love, fidelity and mercy are inspired of God, whose throne no rebel can shake, whose Kingdom shall never end."

"But," said Rusco, "I was bred to think that we be each one accursed for the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden; and that the anger of God tracks us down through the ages. So have I inly rebelled against a God so pitiless as to entail upon innumerable spirits a sin sinned very long since."

David answered swiftly, "My heart tells me that God who created heaven and earth is Eternal Love and falters not, nor errs. Some day, somewhere, all mysteries will be revealed to us; all griefs transmuted, and all wounds of the spirit healed."

Thus Ludovick would propound to David the doubts which had erstwhile weighed heavy; and one by one his fears were dispelled; till he came to think of God no longer as a dreaded inquisitor, insatiable in thirst for the blood and tears of man, but as the glorious Eternal King and Unchanging Friend who grieves for mortal weaknesses and errors, and loves with infinite patience and compassion every created being.

As the load was lifted from Ludovick's mind, so his body gradually regained its normal state, until at last there was no further need for medicines or for the doctor's presence. But before this result could be achieved there had been lapses back into irritability and gloom

A Miracle

and foreboding ; for it is difficult in a few weeks to change the outlook of years ; and he tested David's patience more severely than he knew.

In Lady Rusco David had an ally. She seconded his efforts ; agreed with all his sayings ; divined his wishes as if by instinct ; and never doubted his power to accomplish the desired end. It was as if she strove, to the utmost capacity of a generous nature, to atone for her momentary distrust the day of his arrival. And when at last the health of Ludovick was firmly re-established, it was Lady Rusco who said, " Verily, this is a miracle."

CHAPTER VIII

“GOOD LIKING”

It was the eve of Doctor Arnot's departure, when Mariota and he rode through the woods together.

During the five weeks he had spent in constant devoted care of Ludovick, this daily ride with her had been his only relief from the incessant strain of Ludovick's companionship; a strain increased by his peculiar affection for this difficult yet grateful patient.

“Henceforth,” he said, “my Lady Rusco, I leave Rusco in your care; but, should he need me, I will immediately return.”

She made no answer; and they rode some hundred yards without speaking.

The track by which they walked their horses was canopied with reddening beech trees; and the sun came through in pale shafts. The afternoon was peaceful; there was scarcely even a rustling of leaves or distant murmur of the river.

“How beautiful is this autumn light,” said Mariota. “Shall we ride home by the Roman Camp? No, not that way.”

She stretched out one hand as if to bar a

“ Good Liking ”

winding path branching into the wood. “ Not that way, I entreat.”

David, puzzled by the sudden note of apprehension in her voice, looked at her inquiringly.

“ See,” said Lady Rusco, “ deadly nightshade bordering the track. It leads to the wretched cottage of mad Elspeth.”

“ Who is mad Elspeth ? ” Doctor Arnot asked.

And Mariota answered, “ She is a witch ; misshapen, lean, shrivelled, and hideous ; of a cruel malevolence. When I see her I tremble in terror lest she may cast some spell upon me.”

“ But what power has she ? ”

“ The power of the Devil,” replied Mariota, with unwonted heat. “ They say she is one of Satan’s paramours, and that he comes to her by night to take her riding on the storm-wind.”

“ Are there no young and lovely women in the world,” said Doctor Arnot, “ that Satan must come seeking hideous shrivelled crones ? Are there no Queens, no Princesses, that the Prince of this world must be reduced to court poor miserable old Elspeth ? ”

Mariota’s eyes opened wider. “ You seem to jest,” she said ; “ but is it possible you doubt me when I tell you Elspeth is a witch ? ”

“ What mean you by a witch ? ” asked Doctor Arnot.

"What mean I?" echoed Mariota scandalised. "It cannot be that you, who are wise and learned, need me to tell you what every villager knows. A witch is one who buys power on earth by pledging her soul to the Devil."

Doctor Arnot mused a while. "In the old superstitious stories," he said, "the Devil was a potent personage, who, in exacting services, was wont to offer a rich guerdon: gold, prosperity and ease, the kingdoms of the world, mankind's applause; such were his bribes. But in Scotland now Satan grows miserly, if mad Elspeth shows the measure of his bounty!"

Mariota paused, wondering. "But," said she, still following the train of her thoughts, "'tis said that Elspeth can brew mystic potions, which, given by a woman to her lover, will wake in him such ardour that he neither eats nor sleeps nor can turn aside till he has won her. Surely that must be Devil's magic."

"All base ignoble artifice or evil strategy can be called diabolic," said Arnot; "but the world too quickly gives the name of magic and enchantment to disasters which arise from human passion, or somewhiles from ignorance." "Then," said Mariota, "deliver me from ignorance. Teach me. I would be a willing pupil."

"What would you learn that I can teach?" asked David.

“ Good Liking ”

“ Wisdom, truth, contentment ! ” exclaimed Mariota, with a vehemence in striking contrast to her usual placidity. “ You who are free, who have gone forth into strange lands, you who have seen the cities and the palaces and pageants of happy countries beyond the sea, how can you understand the dreariness of my life ? Day by day it drags its course, and so will drag, for ten or twenty years, drag on till my time comes to grow old and die.”

David held back a branch of red-gold beech which would have struck her as she rode ; but he did not attempt to answer.

Mariota sighed. “ You have heard,” said she, “ how, every Sabbath morning, Master McClorg doles out Hell fire, and threatens us with an eternity of torment if we stray from out the narrow path. I weary of his narrow path. Better had I lived many thousand years ago, in those merry pagan times when song and laughter and happiness were not deemed sinful.”

“ If I may venture my counsel,” David said, “ I would not have you thus confound the thunders of Master Ezra McClorg with the doctrines of the real Christian faith—so full of hope, so rich in promises of divine aid and compassion.”

By this time they reached the open ground which led to the old Roman Camp, and Mariota drew rein and looked around her.

The setting sun was bathing the landscape in a flood of light.

"They say," said Mariota, "that this place is haunted. On dark nights a clash of arms has been heard, and the cries of wounded men. You could tell me of the Romans, who, in the forgotten past, invaded this Galloway. When I ask Ludovick, he says 'They were an alien race, so why think of them?' and the Reverend McClorg thanks God Almighty that Hell is packed with pagans. Be they Romans or Greeks of old, or Papists of to-day, he damnifies them with an equal fervour. But I would gladly credit God with greater leniency. Master McClorg makes God in his own image."

Then Arnot, briefly, but in words incisive and compelling, described to her the force and vigour, the high courage, the superb determination and the iron self-command, which had made ancient Romans conquerors and masters.

As he spoke, an indefinable yet striking change came over him, and Mariota, thrilled and fascinated, hung upon his words.

"You make it seem as if these men are living," she exclaimed.

"So verily they were," he answered.

"So they seem to be again," smiled Mariota, "and I can assure you that you look more like a soldier than a wise dispassionate philosopher and skilled surgeon. Had you lived in Rome two thousand years ago, I vow you would have given wounds, instead of healing."

“ Good Liking ”

Arnot did not reply. She had noticed how seldom he responded to any word about himself; and now she felt unaccountably frightened. It was as if she touched upon some hidden memory. Doctor Arnot let the reins fall loose, and seemed oblivious of her presence. The silence grew tense, and Mariota shivered.

At last David spoke. “ Long ago, before Christ lived and died for our redemption, the philosophers of Greece and Rome, and the mysterious Druids of the north, held that man’s spirit must incarnate many times on earth, and drink the cup of mortal anguish to the dregs, tasting extremes of grief and glory, joy, triumph and despair, ere it dare hope to see the light of true eternal wisdom.”

To Mariota his words seemed sinister and terrifying. “ Oh, hush ! ” she said ; “ this is our last ride together. Speak not of mortal anguish and despair ; not even when you talk of men who have been dead many a thousand years. I do not crave eternal wisdom. I misled you ; it is earthly joy I seek ; sunshine, music, beauty, a happy life ! Never speak to me of death.”

David thought her vehemence must be because her husband not long since had come so near the valley of the shadow.

“ Forgive me,” he said remorsefully ; and her eyes brimmed over with tears.

He looked away, to give her time to get her

emotion under control ; and slowly side by side they rode back towards the castle.

"Alas," sighed Mariota, after a while, "I could wish you need not leave us."

"Assuredly," he said, "there is no further need for any doctor."

Mariota shivered again. "I am grown cowardly, and fear I know not what. I feel that I shall need a friend. Why should I hesitate to tell you that were I in cruel sickness or great grief it is to you I would turn, you I could trust. And now I have a confession to make. Before you came, I maligned you bitterly to my cousin, my Lord Marbrack, President of the Court of Session ; and I besought him to persuade Ludovick to have you quickly sent away. For sheer shame I hesitate to tell you. Yet I cannot forget my folly and childish petulance till you have said you pardon me and will be my unchanging friend."

David smiled, his grave kind smile. "God grant," he said, "that I may have occasion to merit and ever keep your gracious good liking."

PART THREE

“ . . . More desperate from excess of love than a ship drifting in distress over the sea, beaten by winds and waves.”—*Giraut de Bornieil* (1168).

CHAPTER IX

WHITE HAWTHORN

MARIOTA, Lady of Rusco, sat in front of her mirror, a Venetian mirror brought by Ludovick from Padua. Framed in a garland of silver leaves and exotic flowers, wrought by the hand of a skilled craftsman, its steel grey surface was mysterious as a mountain tarn on a brooding autumn day. She gazed into it eagerly as if it held the answer to some vital question of her heart. But the mirror mocked her with her own reflection; a reflection which with all its beauty had no power to delight her.

She was newly risen, and alone; Ludovick had gone forth early with his hawks and hounds. She had breathed more freely since the clatter of his horse's hoofs had died away. In the eight months which had elapsed since Arnot cured him, she had grown each day more painfully impatient of his limitations, more weary of his ardour. The faults she had condoned whilst he was ill and suffering, aroused in her an acute repugnance now that they were blended with a vigour which rejoiced in life and took for granted that she loved him. How crude her husband's passion

seemed ever since the coming of David Arnot she scarcely dared whisper even to herself; but her thoughts dwelt lingeringly on that autumn evening, eight months ago, when he had prayed that he might ever deserve her "gracious good liking." Eight months; and no word or sign from him to solace her loneliness. The fear came over her lest in his search for wisdom he had no thought for her.

Her thoughts were all for him. His calm intellect, his innate nobility of soul, had been a revelation to her; his presence had made for her a paradise as far above the paradise of theologians as his philosophy was beyond the cramped dogmas of McClorg.

She sighed, and going to the window flung it open, and looked out across the river to the Roman camp.

The waters glittered in the sunshine, the sky was blue with a superb translucent colour too seldom seen in chilly northern climates. The scent of hawthorn blossom floated in the air; joyous carolling of birds proclaimed the summer's advent. A soft breeze, ruffling the surface of the waters, whispered in the beech trees, then breathed a caress on Mariota's face, while the sun cast its glory on the red-gold hair which hung around her like a sumptuous mantle.

Her humour changed from yearning to an eager palpitating sense of coming triumph; she remembered only that she was young and

beautiful, and she gloried in her beauty as in the gorgeous glittering day.

She braided her hair, and laced herself into a dress of green and silver. Then, her pulses throbbing as with the presage of some high adventure, some quick-approaching delight, she opened the door and made her way down the stone stair, out into a world which seemed to gleam and quiver with a living beauty.

Her fancy drifted swiftly back to long-forgotten stories of woodland sprites and water nymphs, the gracious fairies and the sportive dryads, who had not been visible within the memory of man.

Close by the Roman camp she paused ; and looked towards the hills with curious expectancy. Yet what she expected she could not have put in words. A wave of indescribable emotion surged up in her heart ; emotion which, with all its strangeness, seemed to have its source so deep down in her being that she felt as one who has awakened from a long sleep, and in awakening has retained some thrilling memory of a dream-world so exquisite and vital that the world of common day, even of this spring morning, seemed but the faint reflection of its glowing and superb delights.

She seated herself on a grassy bank close by a giant hawthorn tree which rumour said was sacred to the fairies ; no peasant could be found so bold as to sit near it or to pluck its blooms.

Mariota smiled.

White Hawthorn

“What matter,” she murmured to herself, “if I do wake the fairies?”

Then gently she began to sing an ancient ballad:—

“O gin my Love were an earthly Knight
As he is an elfin gay,
I wadna gie my ain true Love
For ony Lord we hae.”

and as she sang she snapped off a big branch of blossom.

“Leddy Rusco,” said a rasping voice, “ma Leddy Rusco,” and a figure most unfairylike sprang out in front of her. “Leddy, ye shouldna pu’ that tree, nae mair than ye should sing wanton songs.”

Mariota looked up startled, and saw the Reverend Ezra McClorg, her husband’s chaplain.

He bowed in stiff awkward fashion, then stood glowering upon her.

She vouchsafed no word, but clasped her hawthorn branch more resolutely. Alas, what foolishness to pull the fairy flower, dreaming the while of elfin lovers, and then waken to behold the Reverend McClorg’s broad shadow athwart her path.

“Leddy,” he said, “reflect that life is short, and that Hell’s furnaces are blazing even noo beneath our feet, and sinners wampishing and skirling in the flames.”

Mariota opened her eyes extremely wide, but gave no further recognition of the minister’s offending presence.

Then he came closer. "Leddy Rusco," he said, "aiblins the De'il is stoking up the fire for you."

Mariota half closed her eyes, and answered, "Would you go help him, sir?"

The Reverend Ezra, quite unaccustomed to be flouted, was dumb from bewilderment. Then he coughed, and picked up the thread of his discourse. "Help the De'il," he exclaimed; "nay, wrestle with the De'il! Ah Leddy, shut your eyne and shut oot this deceitful world; then tak' a glimpse into the depths of the black ousome pit. There ye may see the Jews and Papists and Mahomedans, the Bishop of Rome and all his Cairdinals, and a great scaffraff of his lesser minions,—witches, nigromancers, warlocks, and the like; and forbye fair leddies in braw silks and velvets."

"Good Master McClorg," drawled Mariota. "Will I see Jews and Turks and Papists, Cardinals and Bishops,—and never a Minister of our own holy Church?"

"We are God's chosen people," said McClorg, "predestined for salvation; yet some whae should be o' the Lord's elect,—amongst the laiety, ye ken,—are tottering to-day upon the verra verge o' Hell. Some wi' their singing an' their dancing, their lutes an' mirrors and their wanton fripperies, are bringing doon upon their heids Almighty God's hot anger."

Mariota raised her eyebrows. "Verily, good

White Hawthorn

Master McClorg, you could not speak more wisely were you in the pulpit. Leave me now to meditate upon your pious words. Go home and wrestle with the Devil, and compose next Sunday forenoon's sermon; I shall look to hear a sage discourse upon the torments of the Turks and Papists down in Hell."

Mr. McClorg could scarcely believe his ears: it was not often that he won encouragement from Lady Rusco.

"Your Leddyship," said he, "will yet be saved and taken up into the bosom of our feyther Abraham."

And with this benediction he turned rapidly away, and walked off briskly over the bridge in the direction of the path which led to Anwoth.

Mariota waved her hawthorn branch ironically after his retreating form. No sooner was he out of sight and earshot than she began to sing again; this time the words of Elfland's Queen to Thomas the Rhymer:

"O see ye no yon narrow road
So thick beset with thorns and briars?
That is the Path of Righteousness,
Though after it but few enquires.

"And see ye no yon braid braid road
That lies across the lily leven?
That is the Path of Wickedness
Tho' some ca' it the road to Heaven.

"And see ye no yon bonny road
That winds about the ferny brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland
Where thou and I this night maun gae."

The last time she had sung this song, her husband, in an unaccountable ill-temper, had commanded her to silence, and with his own hands snapped her lute strings. Recalling this, she felt defiance surging up in her heart, and again she sang :—

“ O they rade on and further on,
And they waded rivers abune the knee ;
And they neyther saw the Sun nor Mune
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

“ It was mirk mirk night, there was nae starlight ;
They waded through red blude to the knee ;
For a’ the blude that’s shed on Earth
Rins through the springs o’ that countrie.”

Mariota closed her eyes and looked into the magic crystal of her fancy ; oh, how joyous to be Thomas the Rhymer and to ride down with the Fairy Queen into those mystic regions.

Better still to be the Fairy Queen and to beguile True Thomas.

“ He has gotten a coat o’ the fine fine cloth
And a pair o’ shoon o’ the velvet green ;
And till seven years were come and gane
True Thomas on Earth was never seen.”

Mariota pulled another branch of hawthorn, and again another ; and she then sank beneath the tree and heaped her spoils on the bank beside her. Despite her twenty-two years, she had a child’s capacity for living in the moment ; and now, with Ludovick away for a day’s hawking, Master McClorg gone home to write his sermon, blue sky overhead and the sun

White Hawthorn

shining, and a world of thought and fancy open to her without fear of interruption, she saw no reason why she should not play at being happy.

Yet even as she was craving for happiness, a shadow of melancholy fell upon her; her thoughts dwelt on the memory of that day when Arnot rode with her across this Roman camp; the day that she had exclaimed because he spoke so fervently of the old pagan warriors. Then he had fallen silent, sailing far away upon a sea of thought and leaving her alone ashore. She remembered how he put his thought into words. She could almost believe she now heard him speaking; the tones of his voice she could recall, and the way his eyes looked out into the distance and then back at her. "Long ago," he had said, "long long ago,—before Christ lived and died for our redemption,—philosophers of Greece and Rome and the mysterious Druids of the north held that man's spirit must incarnate many times on earth, and drink the cup of mortal anguish, tasting extremes of grief, joy, triumph, despair, ere it dare hope to see the light of true eternal wisdom."

Mariota cared but little for an abstract notion; a thought for her must always be impersonated; and to make a drama of her thoughts, seeing them as figures in a pageant, and weaving for them thrilling incidents and gay adventures, this was her refuge from the emptiness of her own life. Truth to tell, like

many another amateur of drama she was wont to be the Queen of Love and Beauty at the tournaments of her own fancy. Whether the scene was on the ramparts of Dunbar, or on the windy plains of Troy, or braes of Elfland, it was she who played the Lady Agnes, Helen, or the Fairy Queen, with absolute and unquestioned jurisdiction.

In her cramped life, her few books and her treasured lute had sometimes roused the jealousy of Ludovick. Jewels he gave her willingly, and furs and velvets; these were to make her lovelier for his own delectation; but her old romance book he had taken from her. Little he knew how she was revenged when she escaped into her secret kingdom.

As she sat beneath the hawthorn tree, its heavy perfume made her drowsy, and the chirping of the birds seemed like a lullaby. Ever a creature of impulse, she slid gently down the grassy bank, raised her right arm, and pillowed her head upon it. Then she closed her eyes, and strove to conjure up David Arnot's face and voice, as he looked and spoke when he had told her of the ancient Romans.

But the ballad of True Thomas jingled in her ears; she saw herself in a green mantle like the Queen of Elfland; and Thomas the Rhymer came out from a hawthorn thicket, clad not in the fine cloth coat and velvet shoon of the old ballad, but in a strange unwonted garb. On his head was a gold helmet, and his breast was

White Hawthorn

cased in golden armour with an eagle heavily embossed. His arms were bare, but golden bracelets gleamed on his wrists; gold bands were clasped above his elbow. She looked down at his feet to the curious sandals he wore, and the cross-garters wound in and out; and the white tunic with its edge of golden broiery. All this she saw in less than half a moment.

When he came nearer, the sunlight glinting on his helmet dazzled her so that she could not distinctly see his face.

The sun's heat and the scent of hawthorn stifled her; and her heart beat to suffocation with a terror in which joy was blended.

She swayed and would have fallen, but his arms had caught her, and his breastplate was pressed close against her bosom while his lips sought hers.

Then with a loud cry she awakened trembling.

She rubbed her eyes, and looked round in perplexity. There was the Roman camp, and there the purple hills; and here the ancient thorn tree and the mass of blossoms she had gathered.

And yet how changed. Though the sun shone and the birds twittered, just as they had twittered when she had fallen asleep, she did not know if it were but seven days, or seven years, or only a few moments she had been away in Elfland. Her heart still throbbed, and

again she almost could feel the pressure of the Roman's breastplate.

Suddenly she realised she had not seen his face. No, but she knew it; would know it were it one amidst ten thousand. Beautiful stern features, arched eyebrows, and grey eyes; flashing like a sword blade in sunshine. Too well she knew those eyes in her waking life.

The galloping of a horse's hoofs, the cry of a startled heron in mid-air, a shout and then an oath, broke in upon her new emotion. But she paid little heed to mere external sounds.

"Mariota," said her husband's voice, "O Mariota; you know how I forbade you ever to pick white hawthorn."

Then Mariota, to her own astonishment, burst into tears.

CHAPTER X

ENCHANTMENT

At the sight of Mariota's tears, Ludovick was overwhelmed with penitence for having spoken roughly ; but with his penitence was mingled secret joy, for he believed it would have been impossible such slight words of his could wound her had she not loved him now almost as passionately as he loved her.

"My dearest," he said, "there is nothing I would deny you ; if your fancy is for May-blossom, each thorn tree in the countryside shall be denuded of its flowers for your pleasure. But you well know the tradition—older than the old stones of Rusco Tower,—that whoso brings white hawthorn within doors is doomed to sorrow unto death."

"We are all doomed to suffer and to die," said Mariota. "Do you think we may escape the common lot ? Would you be immortal, impervious to grief and time ?"

She spoke with an intensity which startled while it fascinated Ludovick.

Involuntarily he recalled the classic story of the heathen sculptor who had patiently adored a marble image, until at last by a miracle the

exquisite cold beauty of the statue quickened into a living breathing woman, aglow with marvellous love.

Yet Ludovick felt ashamed to liken himself and Mariota to these fabled pagan lovers ; and it seemed to him as if she were reading his thought, for her face grew pale, and then flushed.

Together they returned to the Castle ; he leading his horse, with his Norway falcon on his wrist.

Could he but have known, as he walked beside her, he appeared to her like one of those figures, meaningless and tediously irrelevant, which interrupt the sequence of dreams. When she had spoken, her words came from her heart, but it was not to him they had been addressed ; and when she was silent he had no part or place in her thoughts. Her consuming need was to return in memory to that enchanted kingdom from which his sudden unexpected presence had awakened her ; a kingdom where she ruled as Queen, and yet was a humble willing servant to Love ; Love incarnate in the person of that noble Roman who was one with David Arnot.

Like a child to whom no fairy tale is too astounding for belief, no vision too strange to be accepted as reality, Mariota surrendered herself—unhesitating, joyous and unashamed—to the enchantment that had come upon her.

Enchantment

In those crucial moments she neither thought, reasoned, hoped, feared ; but only loved. And through this overwhelming love it seemed to her that she was reborn into an alluring ancient world of joy and freedom.

CHAPTER XI

AN ANCIENT TRAGEDY

“ Over the mountains
And under the waves,
Over the fountains
And under the graves,
Under floods which are deepest
Which Neptune obey,
Over rocks which are steepest,
Love will find out the way ! ”

The voice of Lady Rusco rang exultantly on the last line.

Ludovick looked up and smiled.

The Reverend Ezra McClorg was miles away ; the walls were thick ; there was no one to tell the minister that Lady Rusco was singing what he had denounced as “ godless songs.”

“ The Gordian knot
Which true lovers knit,
Undo you cannot,
Nor yet break it.
If Earth bars the Lover
He'll gallop it o'er ;
If the Seas should o'erthwart him
He'd swim to the shore ;
Should his Dear become a swallow
Through the air to stray,
Love shall lend wings to follow ;
Love will find out the way ! ”

An Ancient Tragedy

Ludovick looked up again from his book. "My Sweet," he said, "I could listen to your voice for ever."

Mariota smiled strangely, and in an almost defiant tone she sang :

" Vain is all striving
To cross Love's intent,
Vain all contriving
Love's will to prevent ;
When the Lover's Lady greets him
By night or dawning day,
Though Death's grim challenge meets him,
Love will find out the way ! "

As Mariota in passionate exultation sang the last high note, one of the strings of her lute snapped.

The glow faded from her face.

But Ludovick in his happiness had become less observant ; or rather his mood was proof against adverse omens.

"Six months bypast I should have shuddered if that string had broken," he said ; " I should have deemed it ominous of disaster. But now you make me so happy, I can laugh at omens. Each day you grow more lovely. Not Helen of Troy, nor Yseult, nor even Deirdre can have been more exquisitely fair."

"Oh hush, hush," said Mariota, and there was genuine fear in her voice ; "do not talk of those ill-fated women ; they brought ruin and death to all who loved them."

"Forgive me," said Ludovick humbly.

But Mariota, having forbidden the subject of these ancient tragedies, herself immediately renewed it.

“Know you not,” she said, “how ’tis said that it was here, to this very coast, that Deirdre and her husband and his brothers came from Ireland, flying to escape the anger of the terrible King Concobar. Before Deirdre was born it was prophesied that through her must come sorrow, and the curse which would scatter the Red Branch warriors and hurl in the dust the power and glory of the King. Wherefore the King commanded that the child be taken away to the forest fastnesses, or hidden by a wise druidess, and never allowed to see the face of a man. In solitude she dwelt fourteen years ; but each day she grew more beautiful.”

Ludovick smiled. “And I doubt not some lover came ; but I forget the story.”

“I remember it well,” said Mariota. “Deirdre was kept concealed ; and even the King did not know the secret of her hiding place. But one forenoon as he was hunting in the forest, by an evil chance, or destiny, he came upon her dwelling, and beheld her standing in the doorway. Then the spell of ill-starred passion entered his heart, though for dread of the curse he turned and went away, conquering the temptation to speak to her of his love.

“And she was glad he had gone. She feared his piercing eyes. Never had she gazed face to face on any man ; but in her dreams

An Ancient Tragedy

she had seen three fair and princely youths. And at last Fate so led the three brothers that they penetrated the depths of the vast forest ; and she beheld and welcomed them.

“ ‘ Beautiful warrior,’ said she to the eldest one, the leader, ‘ You are he whom I have seen in joyous visions. Truly I love you, Noble One, now and for ever.’ ”

“ And he answered, ‘ Fairest of all women, can you be born of mortal parents ? Are you not rather an angel out of God’s Paradise ? ’ ”

“ And she answered, ‘ I am Deirdre.’ ”

“ Then he knew it was she through whom the curse was fated to fall. Yet his heart cried out against the prophecy. How could evil come to Erin through so fair and exquisite a creature ? ”

“ Come life or death, he could not reject her. So he, and his two brothers, who would never desert him,—the three bravest knights of the Red Branch—carried Deirdre away, and fled with her secretly to Scotland.

“ There the years passed, and they dwelt together in the Highlands. It seemed as if the terrible King dared not pursue them with his vengeance.”

Ludovick listened, interested.

“ But, alas,” Mariota said, “ though Deirdre was happy as a bird in springtime, not so her lover, her husband. All the while his joy in her was darkened by the thought that he had disobeyed and wrongfully forsaken the King, his

friend and leader ; and the grief of the exile weighed each day more heavy on his soul.

“One sunlit morning he and his brothers saw a sail approaching over the sea from Ireland ; and they hastened to the shore, hungry for tidings of their home. From the ship there landed an envoy, who saluted humbly and said, ‘To the valiant ones, greeting, and the great King’s pardon. The enemies of the Red Branch muster and combine ; the loyal rally round the throne. Return ; for the King loves and pardons you ; and your old comrades shall feast you ere going forth to fight again under the ancient banner.’

“And Deirdre said, ‘Nay, my love, go not ; I feel the darkness of death. Stay here, Beloved, and be happy.’

“But her husband spoke sternly, ‘Is it for my true Love to counsel cowardice ? Nay, we must return, or be for ever dishonoured.’

“Then Deirdre wept. But the brothers said to her, ‘Nay, Sweet One, the King sends gracious pardon. Never would he speak a false word ; you do ill to doubt him.’

“But she only wept the more.

“And they took ship with the envoy and landed in Erin, and returned to Emain, the King’s chief city. But no Guard of Honour welcomed them ; nor did they see the King ; nor were the great doors of the palace opened to receive them. In a little room, far from the presence chamber, they waited.”

An Ancient Tragedy

Mariota broke off abruptly ; the sun was setting in flaming crimson ; she watched it a moment before she took up the thread of her story.

“I know not if the King intended treachery from the first ; but as Deirdre arrived, he, hidden, looked out and beheld her beauty ; and his heart grew black with anger that she loved another. He vowed to take her for his own. So he went for his Arch-Druid, a powerful magician, who hated the hardy warriors, and he said, ‘Smite me the husband of Deirdre with a spell which shall cripple his strength ; yea, and cast blindness on his eyes. So ardently do my warriors love him that I know none who would lift a hand against him, even at mine own command. But call together my slaves ; arm them with javelins, and cast a spell upon the lover so that he may not even see his foeman, nor unsheathe his sword.’ ”

Ludovick frowned. “How vile a strategy ! ”

“Yea,” said Mariota. “And Deirdre pleaded, ‘Lo my husband, hearken to me ; for the danger creeps nearer. Let us fly while there is yet light.’ But he answered, ‘Nay, Sweet One, shame would it be for me to doubt the word of the King.’ ”

“Then entered the Arch-Druid ; and with a terrible spell he blasted the erstwhile unconquerable warrior,—the ancient spell of winds and waves and waters. To the hero it seemed as if he, with his fair wife and loyal brethren,

were back in the tossing ship, and sinking beneath the fury of a blinding tempest. 'Alas, my Love,' he said to Deirdre, 'never more shall we tread Irish ground. Never more shall I go forth to battle. Lo, we sink within sight of land; and against the demons of the waves my sword can be of no avail. But the Gods be thanked, we die together, my eternally Belovèd.' "

Mariota's voice trembled. "Then said Deirdre, 'My Love, it is a spell. Awaken.' And the brothers said, 'Yea, there is neither sea nor storm; awake from dreams. Let us meet death with drawn swords.'

"But so potent the cruel spell, that even when the horde of slaves rushed in, and smote and wounded mortally the gallant brethren, yet was Deirdre's husband still powerless to open his blinded eyes or stir his mighty sword arm. And as he fell, transfixed by the slaves' poisoned spears, he cried with a loud voice, 'Our ship is shattered; the waves draw us down into the fathomless abyss. Alas, that I shall never see the King!'

"And thus he died.

"Then the King came and gazed on the dead bodies of the brethren; and an anguish of repentance smote him, for he knew his name would be dishonoured. Nevermore would any trust his word, nor any gallant honourable soldier fight beneath his banner."

There was a long silence. The tears

An Ancient Tragedy

brimmed over and rained down Mariota's face.

In an instant Ludovick was beside her.

"My Dear One," he said, "this is a tragical story; but it happened thousands of years ago in pagan ages. I would not have you weep over long-buried sorrows."

Mariota trembled. "Nay, I know not why," she said, "but when I look across the sea I grieve for those unhappy lovers, and dread lest spells be cast thus, even in our present time. Not yet is Lucifer the Rebel, with his evil spirits and dark necromancers, conquered and thrust down into the dungeon-pit; and so, at nights when the wind howls and the sea lashes on the shore, oftentimes I am afraid."

Ludovick embraced her silently, and spoke gentle soothing words as to a child. But she only shuddered the more.

"Ludovick, make me a promise; say 'In the name of God I promise.'"

"Sweetest One; what would you bid me promise?"

"Promise," said Mariota vehemently, "that if ever a wicked spell is cast upon me, if ever I talk in wild words, and act in strange bewildering ways, you will forgive."

"Promise," said Ludovick. "By the Eternal God I promise. But you will never be bewitched. The warmth of my love protects you."

David Arnot

Mariota looked at him, and looked away ; and then put her hand over her eyes.

“ Verily,” she murmured ; “ I have been dreaming.”

Ludovick gazed on her, bewildered.

“ Yea,” she said, “ I dream. But what are dreams ? They pass like shadows. Let us waken.”

CHAPTER XII

THE STORM

It was not true that Mariota had spoken as in a dream: but as she told the story of Deirdre a sudden terror had gripped her dread of Ludovick himself. If ever he should discover her love for David, would he not kill her?

And she was afraid to die.

Therefore she strove to efface her words; and yet, even after Ludovick had gone out and she was alone, she trembled lest by pity for the long-dead lovers she had betrayed that she too loved and feared, and quivered under a premonition of approaching anguish.

She rose and moved restlessly about the room; then gazed into a mirror to see if her face disclosed the tempest in her heart. But no; though her eyes burned, her face was impassive, almost marble in its pallor.

She put her hand up to her brow and strove to think. For many months she had alternated between vivid flashes of fancy or of intuition, and a dreamy languor; and now that she desired to see clearly, she was whirled into sheer confusion.

She could never love Ludovick she told herself one moment ; but the next her heart sank with remorse at the consciousness that she was deliberately beguiling and deceiving him. Yet how could she reveal to him the terrifying truth ? Terrifying. No, rather the wonderful and joyous truth. Was there not more joy in bearing secret agony for love of David, than in all the wearisome devotion of poor Ludovick ?

And so her thoughts drifted like a storm-tossed ship ; and she made no attempt to put a firm hand on the rudder and steer for any haven. One moment she wept ; another moment she could have danced in a wild glee like a fairy or a woodland sprite. Then would come upon her a dull and heavy melancholy in which she craved only to sleep.

So the days and weeks passed, and each day she grew more woefully bewildered, more inwardly unbalanced.

"It is Destiny," she said to herself. "Destiny."

Thus she sought to excuse herself to herself, forgetting how she had heard David speak sternly of those who thus evaded responsibility.

"Our souls are divine," he had said, "for we have reason and memory, and the discerning will to choose."

But of this she remembered nothing ; and for love of David she unconsciously offended against David's every precept.

The Storm

It seemed as if her talk of Deirdre and the Arch-Druid's spell,—of the pretended storm at sea and the fearful wreck—had awakened an evil spirit on the Galloway coast, for the ocean roared and thundered in a series of ferocious tempests.

But Ludovick, restored as he was to perfect health, rode or walked in every kind of weather, and revelled in his seemingly unbreakable strength. To Mariota it appeared as if he had become akin to the sea; wild, almost terrible. And yet, when she paused to reflect, she could not ignore that he was ever gentle and tender to her, that he heaped upon her an increasing store of gifts; brocades and furs and jewels; and even books.

She wondered, sometimes sorrowfully, penitently, why she did not love him; and at other times she execrated the tie that bound her to him.

One morning when he went out early, with his hounds and his hunting spear, she said to herself, "Would that he might go on a hunting from which I need never see him come back!"

But instantly she recoiled from her own words:

"Oh, no, no, no," she said aloud; "he is good; he is kind. God forgive me!"

The sun was setting in clouds of angry storm, and Mariota had fallen asleep, lying

wrapped in a fur coverlet, when abruptly she was awakened by a voice outside, and a startled shout as if of fear or utter astonishment. Then she heard a running to and fro, a trampling of feet, a stir and turmoil sounding out above the roar of the wind.

The disturbance vaguely annoyed her ; and she shut her eyes, resolved to sleep.

Then came an insistent agitated knocking, and the door was opened before she had time to say "Enter."

"Why, lass, what scares you ?" she exclaimed to a maid who stood in the archway.

"The Laird, ma leddy ! The Laird ! Puir Rusco ; God help us a' !"

"What, what ?" said Mariota, now thoroughly awakened.

"I'll no say he's deid," sobbed the maid, "but—but——" Her voice broke. "We dinna ken if he be deid or no."

Mariota rose to her feet ; she was ashen pale. She felt like a murderess. She had wished him dead ; and now had the Fates taken her at her word ? Sheer terror seemed to turn her to stone.

"We've sent Sandy oot for Doctor Crackenthorpe," said the maid.

"Doctor Crackenthorpe !" echoed Lady Rusco, rousing herself. "No ; Doctor Arnot. Have the fastest horse saddled, and tell Sandy to ride day and night to Edinburgh. If the doctor be not at his lodging in the High Street,

The Storm

Sandy must travel till he reach Menteith Lake ; then cross to Inchmahome,—find Doctor Arnot, and crave him to come swiftly hither. For if there be but one gleam of life left in the Laird, 'tis Doctor Arnot—and Doctor Arnot only—will restore him.”

Ludovick was not carried up the stairs ; they made a bed for him in a room below ; and Mariota watched beside him. He lay in a deep swoon, and Doctor Crackenthorpe could only mutter and murmur and apply futile restoratives.

How the accident had happened none could say, but a huntsman had found Rusco unconscious near a tree which had been blown down in the storm. Was it a wizard's spell ? Was it a sudden return of his old illness ? Who could know ?

After a day and a night he opened his eyes and gazed on Mariota blankly ; then again he swooned, and she believed that he was dying.

In the ensuing days Mariota lost all sense of time ; each hour seemed an age. But at last Arnot arrived.

Merely to see him gave her new strength. His words were few ; but, as he spoke, her anxiety gave way to calm trusting certainty that he would save and heal.

“ It is a miracle ! ” said Lady Rusco ; the

words she had used before. For Ludovick, thanks to David's care and skill, came back from the verge of the grave.

What had happened he was only vaguely aware; but he thought that a branch of the falling tree must have struck him on the head and stunned him when he was weary after a long and unsuccessful day of hunting for a ferocious wolf the villagers had complained was lurking in the forest. He remembered the storm of rain, the wind and lightning, and the crashing noise made by the stricken tree. And then he could recall no more till he had wakened to find David Arnot bending over him.

In the first shock of terror lest he should be dying, Mariota had almost loved her husband. But as he came back to life, she felt once more a sheer repugnance.

Had he but died, she would have been released.

She had never loved him, she thought. She never would love him. And yet—and yet——?

So her chaotic wonderings would break off with a question.

And how and when could such a question find an answer? Even as she was asking it over and over again in her mind, Ludovick, for no apparent reason, took a turn for the worse; and in fever and delirium all through one wretched day he called incessantly on

The Storm

her as the only one in whom he could take comfort.

Never had she pitied him more ; never had she loved him less.

But David's presence gave her a strength above and beyond her own, and, for love of David, she could be patient with her husband.

CHAPTER XIII

MIDNIGHT

It was Martinmas Eve, a cold wild night, with storm-clouds racing across a moonlit sky, and a tempestuous gusty wind shaking the naked branches of the trees and ruffling the surface of the river.

David Arnot stood by the window and looked out, but with an unseeing gaze. He was too weary to sleep, though needing rest after his broken nights and strenuous days.

Lady Rusco had assured him she was well and unfatigued, and she had begged to watch in his place that night. Promising to call him if her husband should have need of him, she had accompanied him into the ante-room, where six tall candles burned in sconces, and a fire of pine logs crackled on the wide stone hearth. Beside the hearth two ancient oaken chairs displayed the Corsane eagle roughly carven, and the pious motto *Virtute non astutia*. Lady Rusco sank for a moment on to one of these chairs. "I trust," she said, "that I shall not require to disturb you. Rusco sleeps peacefully—and so I pray may sleep through the night."

Midnight

"If he waken," David had repeated, "I shall be here and at your commandment."

Yet still she did not go away. Clearly she was reluctant to return into the sick-room.

David could not blame her; she had shown during the past ten days a self-control and patience which endowed her with an added charm, and he looked on her with frank admiration.

She rose from her chair, unwillingly, yet decisively. "Good-night," she said, "good-night; pleasant rest."

Then Arnot had opened the door and she had passed silently into her husband's room.

This had been some two hours earlier; yet Arnot was still wakeful. He had pushed back the heavy shutter, and allowed the cold night air to stream into the room; but it chilled rather than revived him, so again he closed the shutter.

Outside, the storm-wind moaned and sobbed; but within there was a deep mysterious quietness. In a house where for hundreds of years men had lived and died, such quiet often is stirred with phantom sounds. As a shell held to the ear conveys a far-off murmur of the vast illimitable waves, so does an ancient castle hold within itself, for those who listen, echoes of loves and hates, of joys and fears long dead and buried. Such unseen presences came thronging around David now, and kept him wakeful.

In his normal state, sleep was for him a blessed respite from the stress of waking life ; a merciful forgetting of the arduous battle against ignorance, disease and vice, and all the pain and squalor of human life. To close his eyes in sleep had been to soar into a region of serenity, of calm and quiet rest as in green pastures beside tranquil waters. He was accustomed to waken calm and vigorous, his energies replenished, his hopes renewed. But this special night a premonition of approaching danger hung over him, and though he cast himself down on a wolfskin and resolutely closed his eyes, he grew only more and more wakeful.

The wind was like the sound of living voices ; voices of misery and hatred ; and it affected David strangely. He put his hands up to his ears to shut it out, but it reverberated in his brain. So from hour to hour the night dragged on.

At last he fell into sleep ; a sleep in which he dreamt prison walls had closed around him and some frightful doom was fast approaching.

So deep asleep was he that he did not awaken when the door was opened and a black-cloaked figure glided softly into the room.

It was Lady Rusco. She held her cloak across her breast with one hand, which gleamed ivory white against the blackness of the velvet, and with the other hand she touched Arnot gently on the shoulder.

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Instantly he started up. "Is Rusco in pain?" he said, and a new premonition of danger clutched at his heart.

"Nay," said Lady Rusco in a whisper. "Nay, not Rusco. He sleeps peaceful and serene as any child. But it is I who suffer."

Seating herself on one of the chairs near the hearth, she drew her cloak more closely round her.

David asked no questions, but he heaped pine logs on the fire, trimmed a guttering candle, and waited till she spoke.

"Be kind," she said; "do not look so cold and far-away. It cannot be that you, who have brought health and healing to the meanest, will be harsh to me."

David could see no trace in her of any illness; yet the note of anguish in her voice was unmistakable.

"Alas," she said, "I know not how to put in words what troubles me. The days are dreary and the nights are horror-haunted. To-night I have outrun the boundary of endurance."

David was perturbed. "You know well," he said, "that if your trouble can be eased by human comfort, you may command me always."

"How can I tell you what it is," she whispered, "how dare I tell you? If I told you all, I think that I should die of shame; yet why should I be ashamed to speak what I take no shame to feel?"

She rose and stood before him, not hastily, but with a proud deliberation which was almost a defiance.

The logs on the hearth flared, and the flames danced and curvetted ; they cast a fitful light on Lady Rusco's pale face framed in gleaming masses of hair.

Doctor Arnot stood up and looked at her, and looking realised anew how beautiful she was. Her beauty gave him a sudden vivid thrill of pleasure, such as he might have felt in looking on a gorgeous landscape or a noble work of art.

Actuated by his habitual desire to aid and console, he smiled gravely but reassuringly.

"What service may I do?"

"Come closer," she murmured under her breath, "and I will tell you. And yet, now that the time has come, believe me I am afraid to tell you."

Instead of coming closer, Arnot stood back in the shadow.

"Sit down," he said in his gentle voice ; "sit down ; shut your eyes ; and think of me not as a man divided from you by a thousand artificial barriers, but as a human soul,—a soul which has no craving, no ambition, save to bring peace and healing to all who suffer. You need not hesitate to tell me what it is that grieves you. I had thought you trusted me."

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"You alone in all the world can cure me," she said vehemently. "Promise you will cure me. Promise."

And from out the shadow his voice came—low toned but emphatic—"God grant that I may cure you."

Then the flood gates opened.

She flung back her cloak, and from its enshrouding darkness she emerged clad in a thin white gown and in the glowing mantle of her hair.

"God!" she exclaimed. "You are my God; I live for you. I would die for you. Oh David, never in this world has any man been loved as I will love you. Were you a King, an Emperor, a ruler of the universe, I could not prize you more; and yet I had not dared to breathe even one word of love, had you not bade me. Believe me there is nothing I will withhold from you. Let us fly from this grim hateful country; fly to Italy, the land of joy and sunshine and true beauty; there I will lavish on you such a wealth of adoration that verily you shall deem yourself in Paradise."

As the tempest of her passion surged round David, he turned icy cold. He was smitten with such overwhelming grief and horror that although he strove to speak and stem the torrent of her self-betrayal, he could find no words.

Mariota stood with her arms outstretched

Then she half-closed her eyes and put one hand up to her breast.

"Why do you hesitate," she said. "Have I not told you I am yours,—yours only?"

David shuddered. "What demon-haunted dream is this?" he said. "Never in waking life would Rusco's lady thus betray him."

Mariota's eyes flashed, and her hands were clenched.

"Rusco's lady!" she said fiercely. "Rusco's lady! You speak as of Rusco's horse or hound. Rusco's? Never have I willingly been his. We women are bought and sold as surely as slaves were bought and sold in ancient Rome. Our parents give us to the highest bidder; and then command us to love and obey the husbands they have forced upon us. Do not fear to rob poor Rusco of my love. You cannot take from him what never was his."

David drew back a step, his face pale from the stress of poignant pity.

She felt this pity swiftly; her voice changed from bitter indignation to caressing tenderness. "Oh my dear Love," she murmured, "this is no sudden passion. All through the ages and through many changing lives you have been mine,—mine only."

David stood as if turned to stone; but Lady Rusco clasped her hands and came still closer to him. "I can be patient," she said brokenly; "if need be, I can wait. And no other woman could love you as I love."

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Then David spoke.

"Never have I sought woman's favour ; never suffered pangs of love. To me the faces of fair women have been as flowers in a garden or as pictures wrought in tapestry ; no more."

Mariota gazed at him with shining eyes. "Then are you more entirely mine !"

The wind sobbed itself asleep ; there was deep quietness ; silence so tense that it seemed the stillness of enchantment ; and although David struggled to fashion in his mind the fitting words to break the spell, he was held by such a crushing sense of dumb helplessness as comes sometimes in dreams.

This white-robed woman with her mantle of auburn hair, her burning eyes, her pallid face, seemed no more the Lady Rusco he had known and befriended, but rather some phantom, spectre, or strange apparition, out of a past so remote that he felt as if he listened to an ancient ballad or old myth, a tragic song of love and madness which stirred in him some wild forgotten sorrow.

The apparition glided closer, and her voice was joyous and triumphant. "You are remembering," she said. "All this delusive present melts away. The time past—the time of our true life—comes back to us ; the time when you wore sword and breastplate, and came wooing me with such strong mastery that I had neither will nor power to withstand

you. Ah, my beloved !—at last you have come to me ! ”

With a stifled cry she flung out both her hands and laid them upon David's breast ; her eyes closed in an ecstasy of passionate anticipation ; one moment more, and then his arms would be around her and his lips on hers, even as in her dream beneath the hawthorn by the old Roman camp. In the mad recklessness of her longing, all thought of Ludovick vanished completely from her consciousness ; she felt herself free to give and lavish upon the chosen one a love as deep, vast, immeasurable as the ocean.

And in that instant David was pierced with a sudden anguish of remorse, a sense of guilt, foreboding, calamity ; and it seemed as if waves of the hungry sea roared and swirled around him, with an elemental force in which was neither pity nor conscience.

But close on the heels of crucial menace came the warrior instinct to resist, to wrest victory from the very jaws of disaster.

It was as though he suddenly awakened from an atrocious dream.

Gently, yet with a strength which there was no withstanding, his hands closed round her hands ; he lifted them from his breast, and held her away at arm's length ; while he looked into her eyes with an intense determination to vanquish once and for all this spirit of chaos and destruction, which, under the name of love,

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had gripped and fascinated Rusco's unhappy wife.

Despite her protest, it was as "Rusco's wife" that he thought of her ; never for one instant as his own beloved.

As he looked into her eyes, it was as though he saw not only this one victim of blind passion, but behind her a deep abyss more ancient than the visible world ; and from the depths he thought there uprose wails and cries of a myriad tortured spirits.

Mariota saw his face grow ashen white, and in its pallor it appeared terrible.

Still he gripped her hands ; but so cold was his grip that it struck fear into her heart, turning her blood from fire to ice.

With anguished eyes she gazed up at him, and gazing trembled. This man she had hoped to dominate now seemed as far beyond her as if he were of another race.

A gulf yawned between her soul and his. In his actual presence, even beneath the gaze of his eyes, and with his hands touching her hands, she was alone.

He released her hands.

"Lady Rusco," he said, "shut this night's happenings from out your memory ; I too will bury them in oblivion."

Mariota gazed at him with mingled awe and terror. When the great loneliness had come upon her an instant ago, all her vigour ebbed, and left her hopeless, inert. She felt that hence-

forth she would live only as a phantom, not a woman of warm flesh and blood.

"I will never speak to you of love again," she said; "nor will I give any other man the love that you reject. I will do your bidding now and always. Only bid me not go to Ludovick to-night; I could not watch beside him; I am blind with grief."

David looked at her again with piercing bright eyes in which she saw at the same moment her God and her doom.

"Forget this night of storm and madness," he said. "Believe me, the love of which you speak is a delusion bred of wakefulness and watching. When the dawn comes the shadows will have gone."

She made no answer; it seemed to her that he had killed her as surely as with sword or dagger.

Then without hesitating another moment, he opened the west door and passed into her husband's room.

As the door closed behind him, Mariota staggered, and would have fallen had not she stretched out her hand and leant it against the wall.

Outside the wind rose again in a wild shriek. The shutters rattled; the curtains swayed, and clouds of smoke were blown down the chimney.

Lady Rusco gasped for breath; then she felt her way along the wall until she reached

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the couch. Sinking on her knees beside it, she bowed her face down on her hands.

“Oh God, God,” she prayed, “forgive me, and have pity. Cruel God; let me die!”

CHAPTER XIV

THE MORNING AFTER

WHEN David entered the room where Rusco lay, all was serene and silent ; the lamp burnt with a steady light ; thick curtains drawn across the windows dulled the moaning of the storm outside. Rusco was sleeping. David, treading gently on the wolfskins, sank into his accustomed place, whence he could keep a guard upon his patient and could command a view of both the outer and inner doors.

He had now come to the parting of the ways ; and his first impulse was to put a hundred leagues between Mariota and himself. Yet he was unwilling to abandon Rusco to the ministrations of old Crackenthorpe.

But how could he face Mariota ?

Cherishing for Rusco a deep and true devotion, he was the more aghast to find he had inspired such tragic passion in the heart of Rusco's wife. Amazement, pity, bewilderment, in turn possessed him. The life that he had led, a life of absolute unquestioning devotion to a noble cause, had fortified him against casual temptations even at the age when such temptations are most potent. His energy and

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vigour had so early been centred upon great ambitions—lofty aspirations of the intellect and spirit,—that he consistently held aloof from vices which were more repugnant than alluring to a nature so essentially refined and proudly self-controlled. And now, far from being flattered or inflamed by Lady Rusco's revelation, it appeared to him incomprehensible and a calamity. The regard he had given her had been free from any base alloy ; it was prompted by sympathy and such disinterested affection as he believed to need no apology. He had essayed to help and comfort her, and enlarge her mind ; and he had roused instead this mad infatuation.

The horror of it overwhelmed him. He bowed his head down on his hands, and tried to pray,—for Mariota so unhappy and misguided, for Ludovick so deeply wronged, and for himself that he might atone for the harm he had unwittingly wrought.

At this moment Ludovick stirred in his sleep. "Mariota," he murmured, "Mariota" ; and he opened his eyes.

Seeing Doctor Arnot, he asked peremptorily, "Where is my Lady ?"

"Towards midnight she was spent with watching, so I counselled her to rest."

David spoke in level tones, but inwardly his soul revolted from the part he was obliged to play.

Ludovick shut his eyes, but opened them

again. "Women," he said reflectively, "women are the cause of all our miseries. I heartily commend your wisdom in avoiding that sort of torment. In my life there was little choice ; the manifest plain duty of a man in my position—a duty no less to his country than to his name and ancestry—is to get lawful heirs. But God for some mysterious reason chooses to chastise and mortify me ; here am I,—the seventeenth Corsane of Rusco,—at six-and-twenty, after eight years' wedded life,—still childless ! ”

He frowned in an access of futile anger. " Good Samaritan as you are, and very phoenix of physicians," he said, " you walk too far aloof from human yearnings to know how I hunger for a son. If I die without heirs, this ancient family—an offshoot, let me remind you, of the great Corsinis,—vanishes from Scotland ; and my castle, every stone of which I love, goes to the Crown, and will either be conferred upon some upstart favourite, or abandoned to the bats and owls. And,—come closer, David,—deep in my heart I have a fell presentiment that I shall be the last Corsane of Rusco."

" When you are out of doors again, a good horse under you, and your best falcon on your wrist, you will cast off these gloomy fancies bred of sickness and inaction," answered the doctor in his decisive tones.

Rusco stirred restlessly. " When my father betrothed me to the only daughter and sole

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heiress of his brother Ludovick Corsane, I was but sixteen years of age ; she was just twelve ; and though the match was of my parents' choosing, it was a choice I never wished to better. And now, after these many years, I can say that I have loved no other woman."

David was smitten silent ; he seemed to hear the bitter words of Mariota, " We women are bought and sold as surely as slaves were bought and sold in ancient Rome. Our parents hand us over to the highest bidder, and then command us to love and obey the husbands they have forced upon us."

" And yet," resumed Rusco, " my Lady, to whose beauty none can be blind, is cold at heart. She has fancy, wit, imagination, and pretty childish ways ; but she is not yet awake to passion."

Despite his self-control, David winced ; the Mariota of last night, quivering with anguished longing, her eyes ablaze, rose up before him accusingly ; and, though he knew himself innocent even of a treacherous thought, he shrank from Ludovick's outpourings.

But Ludovick was too intent on his own feelings to heed David's evident uneasiness. " The one thing you cannot understand is love," he said, " not even Mariota is more passionless than you. But to confess my fears and sick forebodings—though but to you who scoff at them—eases my mind."

" I did not scoff " protested David. " Rather

I pray for happiness between you and your lady."

"She is not unhappy," Ludovick answered in haste. "A new embroidered gown, a jewel, any pretty bauble, makes her happy; and I gratify her every whim. Yet there are times when I have been jealous even of her books, her lute, her dreams. One forenoon, in the days when first my sickness came upon me, she was playing on her lute and singing some ancient ballad of a mortal maiden and an elfin lover. It seemed no fancy but naked truth,—such was the potency of her strange music. All in a moment I was shaken by a storm of such unreasoning and devastating jealousy—jealousy of I know not who or what—that I leapt up and seized her lute and broke it. She shrank from me; and shrank the more when I essayed to put in words the passion which was tearing my heart. O David, David, how is it that she, in her cold purity and her haughty innocence, had power that day to rouse in me a veritable devil? Were she ever to give to any other man the ardent love she does not feel for me, I would pray Heaven to overwhelm that man with infamy and ruin! I could look on and see him being broken on the wheel or torn asunder by wild horses!"

David turned pale. "Control yourself," he said in his calm stern tones; but inwardly his heart sank.

Rusco's fury was short-lived. "Forgive

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me," he said humbly ; " it irks me that I have so little fortitude. Pain, or fear of pain, be it of mind or body, frets and chafes me till it drains me of my courage ; and were I to fall into the clutches of the Spaniards and be stretched upon the rack by order of the Grand Inquisitor, I dare not promise I should win great glory as a martyr."

"How dare any man be certain of his courage," said David, "until events have proved it?"

Ludovick looked up at him and smiled. "Now you," he said, "are one who in a righteous cause would suffer with Spartan fortitude. The rack never would force from you a secret you were sworn to keep."

David shivered. "Oh hush," he said, "I loathe the name of torture ; nor can I put in words the anger I feel against those who, in the semblance of Justice, wilfully deface and mutilate the bodies of their fellow creatures."

"Surely," exclaimed Rusco much astonished, "the torturing of criminals is an essential part of law, and always has been."

"Would I could change the law," said David ; and the Laird of Rusco laughed.

"'Tis clear," he said, "you were not brought up with *The Book of Martyrs*, printed in Nuremburg and garnished with ingenious cuts of all the torments. I remember showing it to Mariota when she was scarce ten years old. Little vixen, she ran away with it and threw it

David Arnot

in the river ! Nor would she even speak to me for a full hour afterwards."

David felt a sudden rush of sympathy for Mariota.

"My good doctor," said Rusco kindly, "what's amiss ?"

David attempted to smile. "I slept not at all last night, and, to tell truth, I am full weary."

"Go, rest till noon," said Rusco, "Heaven send you pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER XV

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

It seemed to Mariota as if the night were spun out into a thousand years. She thought old age had come upon her suddenly, irrevocably ; and she prayed for death in wild prayers like the invocation of curses upon a tyrannical Creator. As the dawn approached she prayed not only for death but for annihilation.

Hideous pictures she had seen of Hell, exultant faces of devils jeering at human agony flashed on her brain in swiftly-moving panorama ; and she trembled as if the rasping voice of the Reverend Ezra McClorg were threatening and reviling her aloud. He was the only "minister of God" she had known ; small wonder she felt she hated God.

She put both hands up to her head and struggled to think ; there was something David had said once to her about God ; his God was not McClorg's. Was it not possible that David's God would be like David, noble and beautiful and regal ? Would not that Supreme God, Who had created David, know how hard it was for her to look upon David

and not love him? To her tormented fancy, the David who had resisted her now seemed like an angelic being,—something more than man. What was it the Bible said? “The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair.” The words hammered on her brain: “That they were fair; that they were fair.”

Then indignation surged up in her breast like a fierce storm wave. “Am I not fair enough? Am I not fair? Am I not beautiful? Why can he not love me?”

And she broke into a passion of scalding tears, and wept until faintness of exhaustion checked her.

She had thought that she would never sleep; and yet she must have slept, for when she opened her eyes it was morning.

Dazed and confused she sat up and looked around her. Then came a sinking at her heart; and again she prayed for death and oblivion.

From that day onwards during an interminable week her life was like a nightmare.

She spoke, ate, walked, and gave her orders. By her pain indeed she knew she lived; but she felt herself moving through the castle as wearily as a doomed and fettered spirit, wandering meaninglessly.

Strangest of all—yet merciful in its strangeness—no one seemed to know she was suffer-

The Parting of the Ways

ing. Her face in its marble pallor was still beautiful ; her hair shone bright as burnished copper ; her languorous manner became her ; and, dressed in her gorgeous fabrics, she, as in a dream, could hear her grace and loveliness commended by her husband's possessive voice.

She saw and spoke with David. No look or word of his gave any indication that he recalled the strange events of Martinmas Eve. By an effort of iron will he seemed to have wiped out the past. With a stern warrior's hand he had cut away every link that might have bound her to him.

Was this freedom ? Was it peace for him ? For her it seemed more bitter than if she had been slain outright.

Her luxurious instincts vanished ; and she felt that for David's sake she could have endured insult, humiliation, even torture, if at the end he would have crowned her his Queen of Love, acclaimed her as the fairest among women, and taken all she yearned to give him.

She looked in her mirror. Poets and chroniclers of old romance repeated persistently that beauty was the magic power to sway mankind. Was it not by beauty that Helen of Troy and Cleopatra had set the world aflame ? But she, Mariota, had no wish to scorch the universe ; she asked only the love of this one man,—this one who told her love was a dream and a “ delusion ” !

David Arnot

At last the day came when David took leave of her and Rusco ; and rode away into a thick mist, which swallowed him up as if to wipe away even memory.

He was gone. He would never return. This was the end of all things.

But just as Lady Rusco said inwardly to herself, "This is the end," the words came,—unspoken, yet heard deep down in her tortured soul,—“Not the end ; not the end. The parting of the ways.”

PART FOUR

Dimly I dread lest having struck this blow
Of my free-will, I by this very act
Have signed and pledged me to a second blow
Against my will . . .
The first step is with us ; then all the road
The long road is with Fate.

Stephen Philips, " Herod."

CHAPTER XVI

HUSBAND AND WIFE

EVERY day, whether in rain, sunshine, or storm, Mariota went out to the Roman camp. Although no matter where she wandered she carried with her a load of misery, she felt less utterly forlorn, less lonely and despairing, near the Roman camp, than when shut up within the massive walls of Rusco Castle.

It had become her custom to steal secretly away soon after daybreak, wrapped in her plaid, and then creep in and clothe herself in sumptuous garments before going back to Ludovick.

On this especial day, the chilly damp of the November morning seemed to infuse a grey-ness into her very soul, and so on her return she sought to fortify her drooping spirits and to warm her shivering body by donning one of the most gorgeous garments she possessed; an outer robe of Genoa velvet, of a rich brown furred with golden otter, and so cut and slashed as to reveal an underdress of orange-tawny samite arabesqued with pearls. With pearls edging her coif, and a glowing jewel on her breast, she looked exquisitely beautiful. Not yet had her secret sorrow drawn cruel lines

Husband and Wife

across the fairness of her face, or marred the rounded outlines of her figure ; and when her husband saw her standing in the doorway, hesitating a moment to discover if he had awakened, he felt his heart go out to her in passionate love and longing.

"My dearest," he said, "how well you look this morning. Did you sleep happily last night?"

"Not happily," said Mariota, seeking relief in a truth she knew he would not understand ; "not happily. I was disturbed by grievous dreams ; but now, try as I may, I cannot recall them."

Ludovick smiled. "Silly child, do not strive to bring back phantom griefs. Are you not joyous in waking life, that you may laugh at evil dreams ? Before many days have come I shall be strong ; and truly when I look on you this moment I could deem myself restored, had I not vowed to David to obey him and to rest here quiet and submissive until Friday ; by the which time he has promised I shall be well and free from danger. How I must have chafed you these weeks bypast with my dreary lamentations ; but you must pardon me, my Sweet."

Mariota was silent, and as he gazed on her and saw her flush and tremble, again he thought of the white marble statue that was magically wakened into life at the approach of love.

"David has comforted me," he said. "David denied that you and I could be accursed for the

sins of our great-grandfather ; and he bids me put from out my mind my superstitious apprehension. I confessed to him my deep-seated grief,—the fear lest I am doomed to die childless, the last of my race.”

Ludovick raised himself on his pillows, and stretched out one hand appealingly.

Mariota put her hand in his, but shivered when his fingers clasped hers.

“Dearest,” he said, “I never spoke of this to any save David,—David and his master Ilario Cavalli ; but the thought is often in my mind how our great-grandfather Cosmo, the reputed necromancer, was so devilishly cruel to his wife Mariota that maybe the sins of the fathers are to be visited on the children even to the third and fourth generation, and therefore has our love been fruitless. Yet David says my fears are phantoms bred of fever.”

Mariota withdrew her hand and seated herself on a low stool close by the fire.

“Tell me,” she said, “what was the story of the Lady Mariota ; how was her husband cruel ?”

“In its entirety the story is too grim and tragic for your ears,” said Ludovick. “She loved another, but old Cosmo by his necromancies took her against her will ; and then tormented her. Heaven had pity ; and she died within the year. Her one child was our grandfather, the second Cosmo, who married his distant kinswoman, Violante of the Cor-

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sinis. He was dead of a strange disease years before you or I were born. They say he was stately and gracious, but pitiless as steel. His wife lived with him most unhappily; and drooped and pined at Rusco for lack of the Italian sunshine; and still more she pined in hunger for love and joy, which are the birth-right of each woman dowered with beauty."

Mariota gazed at him with wide-open eyes; had he not been her husband she could almost have loved him for the sympathy and pity with which he spoke of these dead sorrows.

"Tell me," she said, "why was our grandfather thus evil and unloving?"

Ludovick stirred uneasily and sighed. "The poison was in his blood. When you remember that he was begotten of devilish lust, and conceived in horror-stricken loathing, can you wonder that his mind was marred and warped and there was neither love nor mercy in his nature?"

Ludovick shut his eyes as if exhausted, and Lady Rusco drew closer to the fire. There was a long silence.

"Mariota," said her husband at last, "come to me here. Kneel beside my bed and pray that before this time next Martinmas, we may have broken the evil spell."

Mariota rose to her feet. "How should we break it?" she said breathlessly, and put both hands up to the jewel on her breast.

"If we could but have a child," said Ludo-

vick ; “ if, after long waiting, I could be thus rewarded, then there would be no man in Scotland happier. Pray for this, my Dearest ; your heart is so pure that your prayers will fly to Heaven on wings,—even though mine may be weighed down by earthly longing.”

Mariota sank on her knees and hid her face. She felt as if her soul were drowning in great waves of anguish. Her own deep overwhelming love for David, while it made her shrink from her husband, yet made her pity him as she never before had pitied. His entire and unquestioning trust brought tears of self-reproach into her burning eyes. She almost wished that she had never known David ; then perhaps she might have been content to love and be loved by Ludovick, and to be mother of his child.

She kept her face hidden and strove to see a way to break through the tangled web which every moment wound its meshes more and more closely round her ; a web of Fate, irrevocable, cruel, and relentless. The thought passed through her mind that many women bore children for husbands whom they could not love ; and why should she expect to escape a common lot, a lot in truth so common that even the women themselves scarcely dared call it tragic ?

At this moment Ludovick put out his hand and laid it on her head.

She shrank from his touch, and her remorse

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changed to an involuntary but poignant revulsion.

But he, intent on his own strong emotions, believed she trembled only from fear lest Heaven might still be deaf to all entreaties. Nor did she speak to undeceive him. She thought she drank the cup of bitterness to the dregs that night when David had left her to despair. But now the conviction weighed upon

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHARM

WHAT could be done? This was the question Mariota asked herself incessantly. Passive endurance, she felt, would be the road to madness.

Several times the impulse came over her to tell Ludovick the entire truth; to throw herself upon his mercy; to beg him to restrain his passionate caresses.

But then she reminded herself that in the eyes of the world and of the law and of the Church, she was as absolutely his possession as if he had bought her and paid for her in the market. How should she tell him the only hope she might feel affection for him would be if he could forego those rights which had become a torment to her.

Sometimes she felt an almost ferocious detestation and disdain of the perpetual subterfuges she was constrained to practise.

She did not grow accustomed to her position; nor did the image of the absent become blurred.

Had she herself chosen Ludovick she would readily have admitted that there might be some

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reasonable obligation to be faithful to him. But she could see no virtue in fidelity to a love which was no love ; and she chafed at a bond made for her by others while she was still a child. Her universe now started and ended with David ; no general law or principle carried conviction. She felt like a prisoner, chafing and fretting to escape ; and, as the days dragged on, she grew more and more rebellious against the constraining bonds.

Yet all the while her voice was gentle and unruffled ; her face was calm ; and no one observed or even faintly suspected the trouble gnawing at the roots of her life.

It happened one forenoon that Ludovick set out to ride to Dumfries, there to confer on estate affairs with a remote but wealthy kinsman ; and during his brief absence—only two days and nights—Mariota matured and carried out a plan which some little while before had come into her mind. It had presented itself in alternations of attraction and repulsion, for it necessitated a secret visit to “ Mad Elspeth,” the very sight of whom had formerly chilled her with instinctive terrors.

But misery, which makes a weak soul abject, made Mariota bold. And yet she was not without caution even in her daring ; it must be in disguise she would go to Elspeth ; for she meant to buy a charm, as if she were a village girl imperilling her soul hereafter to

save herself from present shame and scandal. Mariota, in her long days of tumultuous yet vivid thought, had come to fear that if once she knew herself about to be mother of a child, some instinct of compassion would intervene to keep her from forsaking it; and the heir Ludovick so craved would be thus a means of riveting her fetters more irrevocably. But if she were childless, might not the day come when Ludovick would be prevailed upon to get the marriage declared void? This, at least, was the outcome of her tiring her eyes over some ponderous folios in the bookroom, especially a *Compleat History of the Human Race*, which advocated with considerable emphasis that after a stated period each childless marriage should be legally dissolved.

If Ludovick would see this some day as a reasonable act, then he could wed again, and Mariota at last might win her perfect joy with David. It was, she persuaded herself, David's stern loyalty to Ludovick which stood between her and the realisation of her hopes. It could not be that David would for ever hold so aloof from her. If in her love there were no stigma of dishonour, he would love her in the future as he had loved her in the distant past.

He had forgotten that deep-buried and yet living past; but she would bring it back to him; and the time would come when she would hear from his lips the joyous words, "I love you."

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With such thoughts as these did she struggle to conquer and put to flight the hopelessness which for a while had threatened to engulf her.

The sun had set, veiled in heavy clouds; the mist was rolling up from the sea, and a peasant woman was seen making her way swiftly yet cautiously along the rough footpath which led to Elspeth's lonely cottage.

The woman looked neither to the right nor left, nor did she pause in her walk, until she reached the door of the miserable hut.

Her heart was beating violently, and as she tirmed at the pin her courage almost deserted her. So acute her sudden fright that for a moment she felt her limbs trembling.

And yet the only person who had seen her was the village idiot. She was closely wrapped in a large plaid. Never would anyone suspect that she, Lady Rusco, would condescend to confer secretly with poor old wretched Elspeth whom she had always abhorred.

She waited, breathless; and still there was no answer.

Another spasm of fear shot through her from head to foot; but this attack of terror was succeeded by a flash of resolution.

The door was not closely shut; she pushed it, and it opened.

A fire was spluttering and crackling; and in the fitful light the bent ill-shapen form of

Elspeth appeared even more sinister than Mariota had expected.

The old woman was bowed down over a pot which steamed and bubbled while she stirred it with a wooden spoon.

It was her evening's supper : but to Mariota it appeared a witch's cauldron, and she felt a thrill of horror. Her impulse was to turn and run home again. But with a struggle she overcame her fears.

"Gude-e'en to ye Mither," she said, drawing her plaid more closely round her ; and though Elspeth was hard of hearing, the clear voice penetrated to her, and she glanced up quickly.

"Eh, eh," she grunted ; and Mariota, emboldened to carry her business to the end, stepped back to shut the door, and then spoke again.

"It's yersel' can aid me, Mither Elspeth," she said, "yersel' and nane ither."

Old Elspeth started, and peered at her ; then stretched out a skinny hand and drew her towards the hearth.

"Sit ye doon, ma lass," she croaked ; and Mariota seated herself on a three-legged stool. The firelight flickered on her face ; Elspeth watched her silently.

The silence grew so oppressive that Mariota in a moment broke it. "Help me, gude Mither," she pleaded ; "help a lassie in sair dule."

"It's no a love potion ye're after," said old

The Charm

Elspeth in a wheedling tone, "yer twa bright eyne wad cast a spell mair strang than ony I can gie ye."

Mariota felt herself blushing hotly. She drew back into the shadow.

"Gin it's no a luv potion," whined Elspeth, "what then wad ye seek the nicht?"

Mariota clasped her hands. "Ye ken the ballad o' the witch wife and Sir Randal's Leddy," she said. "Do now for me in kindness what the witch in malice did to the sweet bonnie leddy."

Elspeth stared; then laughed a cackling laugh. Half blind as she was, she had even at a first glance recognised Lady Rusco, whose vivid beauty and dignity of carriage it was not easy to disguise.

The situation gave Elspeth an unholy satisfaction, and, with considerable guile, she set herself to play the part assigned to her.

"Eh, eh, puir lass," she said, "ye wad enjoy yer luv', yet ye wadna brave the reckonin'. Fine ken I what ye would hae."

Mariota's cheeks flamed crimson; for something in the woman's voice renewed all her apprehensions.

"Hae ye no a wee bit siller?" Elspeth wheedled, and Mariota quickly bethought that to part readily with money would be inconsistent with her supposed peasant character.

"I'm a puir lassie," she said. "Twa baw-bees is juist a' I can gie ye."

Elspeth laughed her wheezing laugh. "Come to me the morn wi' a bit siller," she said.

"Na, na," protested Mariota firmly. "Siller's no for you or me. Gie me the chairm the nicht"; and she held out her copper coins.

Elspeth made no answer, but pondered.

That Lady Rusco did not know all her antecedents she felt fairly sure. Old Gibbie, Rusco's most trusted servant knew; but he, when he so pleased, had the gift of secrecy and silence. Sixty years ago Laird Cosmo—of necromantic fame—had chosen Elspeth to aid him in some strange alchemical transmutation for which the presence of a pure maid was essential. Day after day she had been shown by Gibbie up to the high lonely tower where the wizard-Laird sat throned among books, phials and alembics.

But the time had come when the handsome son of the Laird disqualified her for the rôle of stainless purity. And the Laird—seeing the vices of his youth renewed in his own offspring—banished the boy to Italy.

From Italy young Cosmo brought back an outlandish wife by whom he had two children, Cosmo and Ludovick, progenitors respectively of Rusco the present Laird, and of his Lady.

Old Elspeth rocked herself to and fro and groaned. The foreign Lady Rusco, with her strange exotic beauty, had been noted for hair of brilliant auburn, plaited and braided in great bands above her ivory-white brow.

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Elspeth had hated her, and cursed her ; and she had drooped, pined and died.

The living Lady Rusco kept her plaid over her head, but Elspeth was seized with a sudden curiosity to know the colour of her hair.

“Tak doon yer plaid,” she said, “and gie me ane o’ yer hairs.”

Mariota hesitated.

“I canna mak’ the chairm if ye’ll no gie me ane hair o’ yer heid,” said Elspeth.

Mariota did not drop her plaid. She put her hand up under it and drew out one long shining hair.

Elspeth clutched it eagerly, peered at it, laughed her jarring laugh, and snapped the hair in two. One piece she dabbled in the pot over the fire, the other she twisted round her gnarled first finger.

Mariota, frightened yet fascinated, watched her.

“Shut yer eyne,” said Elspeth ; “dinna open them. The chairm is naught if ye’ll no do the wise wumman’s biddin’.”

Mariota shuddered and covered her eyes with both her hands.

Then Elspeth in her quavering voice chanted an incantation, the very sound of which turned Mariota cold with terror. She could not distinguish one word from another, but her vivid fancy pictured demons thronging round the witch in hideous merriment.

Another moment and she felt that she would shriek aloud.

"Open yer bonnie eyne," said Elspeth.

Lady Rusco lowered her hands and looked up.

The fire had sulked and sunk ; the cottage was almost in darkness.

Outside the wind wailed dismally, and Mariota shivered as the witch put into her trembling hand an object which appeared like a small pea enclosed in a cotton bag.

"Cherish it morn and nicht," crooned Elspeth ; "hide it frae mortal eyne ; and pray ye nae mair to God. Say to yersel' 'the Deil keep me,' and ye'll no hae ony bairn. Beauty fades and luv's a snare ; but ye can tak' yer fill o' luv——"

The old woman's voice broke ; her hate of all the blood of Rusco almost choked her.

She opened the door. "Gude-e'en to ye," she said.

"Gude-e'en," faltered Mariota ; and, holding her plaid secure, she turned and ran like a hare chased by the hunters.

Then old Elspeth fell into a wheezy paroxysm of malicious laughter.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HASTY WORD

WHEN Rusco returned from his visit to Dumfries, he found his wife seated beside a fire in the bookroom where the wizard Laird's foreign tomes were carefully preserved. Open on her knee was a Florentine illuminated manuscript with astrological charts and zodiacal signs.

Ludovick frowned. He disliked the ancestral books, especially all those in the Italian tongues; and yet it seemed ill-tempered to spoil Mariota's pleasure in the pictures; so he sat on the opposite chair and watched her.

She was clad in velvet, the colour of the sky on a starry night. To Ludovick her beauty seemed angelic. In her eyes he read love; in her pallor, purity; in her silence, peace and contentment; and her outward serenity and calm allured him as potently as if he were seeing her now for the first time.

"If I had all the world to choose from—Queens on their thrones, beauties of every realm and climate," he said, "I would choose you, my Mariota."

Lady Rusco's heart sank ; she wanted him to weary of her, not to worship her. But she smiled indulgently ; and Ludovick, encouraged by her graciousness, began to talk of David Arnot's reassurance as to the hope of heirs.

"It is to David," he said in conclusion, "that I owe my health and my life."

Mariota felt that not only would she need to break Ludovick of what she classed as his infatuation for her, but loosen the bond of friendship between him and David.

"Truly," she said, "I grow jealous of this Doctor Arnot. You so praise him that although I see his merits and truly value his services as a physician and surgeon, yet I feel you lift him out of his station when you regard him as if his cures were those of a magician."

"Not magic," argued Ludovick, "but wondrous skill, patience, and almost womanly tenderness."

"I like men to be manly," said Mariota ; and an imp of recklessness entered into her. "I revere his virtues, and were I sick I would send for him in preference to another. But whereas I prize him in reasonable degree, you make an idol of him."

Her heart was beating fast ; surely, if she talked thus, Ludovick would never suspect that David was in truth her god and idol. So, after a pause, she spoke again, in the same

A Hasty Word

careless, almost condescending, tone, "When I have seen you hanging on the doctor's every word, watching him with open admiration, deferring to his judgment, and forgetting the passage of time in his good company, I wondered if he were holding you by a spell."

Ludovick rose and took three rapid strides across to where she sat. He put his hands on her shoulders and gazed down at her.

"A spell," he said, "a spell? What mean you?"

His voice was peremptory and harsh.

Mariota began to feel aggrieved and irritated. "I mean that which I say," she answered obstinately.

Ludovick released her shoulders and flung himself with a jerk into his chair.

"When you say a spell," he asked, "deem you that he cured me by ways other than those of lawful science?"

"Truly," said Mariota; "He worked a charm upon you; and you easily believed that he could cure every pang or pain. He was wont to quote from the works of a necromancer a saying as to the will being the master, and the body the mere tool; and it follows that if his will controlled yours, he was your master."

Ludovick frowned again. He did not like the notion of a master. And Mariota—believing she had sown a seed which would grow

and bear fruit precisely as her own will should prompt, went on more rashly than her custom.

"Why may I not say that Doctor Arnot learnt from the Paduan sage some of the mysteries of the black art. Could he not read and understand all these books which neither you nor I can fathom?"

Ludovick stared. "Surely you do not mean he is himself a warlock?"

Then came upon Mariota suddenly an echo of the strange emotion she had felt the terrible night when David had resisted her. Had it not been some magic spell which gave him power to check her passion and control her into silence? For the first time she felt an element of anger marring her love. It went to her head like an intoxicating wine, and the room seemed to reel around her.

"Yea," she exclaimed. "He is assuredly a master of magic."

"O God have mercy," said Ludovick; and the tone of his voice sobered Mariota.

In an instant she knew she had overshot the mark. Ludovick's face was stern and drawn, and he looked at her with eyes in which she saw all his old fears.

"Forgive me," she said, "I have spoken but at random. I cannot weigh each word as if I were our cousin at the Court of Session."

"But you said magic—necromancy," persisted Ludovick.

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Mariota laughed mirthlessly. "Did I so say? 'Twas only a hasty word."

But Ludovick's expression did not change; rather it hardened.

"Necromancy," he said again; "necromancy—O, my God!"

CHAPTER XIX

RETRIBUTION

LADY RUSCO sat before her mirror while her tire-maid brushed out the luxuriant masses of her hair.

It was a wild wet night in winter; the windows had been shuttered and the curtains drawn to dull the roaring of the wind, the plashing of the heavy rain, the groaning of patriarchal trees.

Lady Rusco gazed into the mirror with fixed staring eyes, but it was not her own reflection she was watching. With the inner sight of memory and strong imagination she was seeing David Arnot; and his face—serene and calm, master of himself and of his fate—inspired her with fervent admiration, such as quivered, throbbed, and burned into an intense longing.

“Go,” she said to the woman. “Good-night. My hair is brushed enough.”

“But, Leddy Rusco, it’s no braided.”

“No matter,” said Mariota, “I would sleep now.”

She felt she could endure no human presence; to be alone—alone with her dream-

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vision of an agony and ecstasy beyond the power of expression—this was her crying need.

She went to the window, drew back the curtain and unbarred the shutter. A blast of wind rushed in upon her, lifting the heavy masses of her hair; and the storm swirled against the castle walls like waves lashing the sides of a great ship. On such a night it was that David had resisted her, resisted such impassioned pleadings that she marvelled how mere flesh and blood could have withstood them.

Then she suddenly recalled how she had heard that alchemists and necromancers were invulnerable to the love of woman, loving instead strange creatures born of fire and air, unseen to all eyes but their own; but for them incarnate, visible, and exquisitely beautiful.

Could it be possible that David was, in truth, a necromancer, and that he lavished on a creature of this syren race the love he refused to her? So hideous a thought struck terror into her soul; her blood seemed turned to ice, her heart froze in her breast; it was as if she were drowning in a sea of horror, and the roaring of the wind was as the whirling of waves that sucked her down.

"Mariota," said a voice behind her, a voice hoarse and unfamiliar.

She looked round, shuddering, and there in the doorway stood Ludovick; but a Ludovick

so stern and strange that she gazed on him in an astonished silence.

Her first thought was, had he learnt the truth about her love of David Arnot, and, like the husband in the ancient ballad, was he about to make her expiate by death the sin she sinned in her heart?

The sense of actual danger dispelled all visionary terrors. Sinful she might be, but she was not a coward; so she went over to where the lights shone brightest. Seating herself in a throne-like chair, she folded her hands and sat waiting the dire accusation.

Ludovick shut the door, and drew and fastened the heavy bolts.

Then he came forward with long uneven strides, and, as the light flared full on his face, she saw that it was ashen pale.

Instinctively she rose to meet him; and then to her amazement he seized her in his arms and crushed her in a fierce embrace, holding her with an iron grip.

"Mariota," he said hoarsely, "Mariota, but for you I should pray God for death. In you—you alone, do I find happiness. Happiness! Great Heaven, how can I speak of happiness?"

He released her from his arms and stood back against the wall.

"Oh, how beautiful you are, how beautiful!" he murmured, devouring her with his eyes.

She shivered. "Shut the window, Ludo-

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vick," she asked ; and sank down again into her chair. He knew nothing and he trusted her ; the danger was past ; and yet she felt afraid of some unseen unknown horror.

Obediently he barred the shutter ; and the roar of the wind sunk to a low moan.

"Mariota," he said, in the harsh voice which had startled her, "you spoke the truth, the damnable truth ; he is a warlock—David Arnot—an instrument of Satan ; and I have sinned a black desperate sin in trusting him. Of what avail to cure my body of its pangs if at the price of punishment in Hell fire ? "

Ludovick groaned aloud. "I loved him better than a brother. He seemed the incarnation of nobleness. Such is the potent magic of the Devil, he can make his servants seem saints of God. O, David, David ! "

Mariota looked at him astounded. It was as if he had gone mad. She rose and laid her hand soothingly on his arm. "Hush," she said, "David is no warlock. I spoke but in a fit of anger ; I was jealous of him. Why did you heed me ? "

Ludovick looked down at her with anguished gaze.

"Alas, Belovèd, you spoke more truly than you knew. My eyes are opened. I have seen young Marbrack. He is returned now from Bologna. He knew David Arnot ; knew him for a warlock. He has seen him in Padua with his familiar, an evil spirit in the likeness

of a cat. The very children in the street cried out against him as a wizard, a necromancer."

"Mungo was ever a liar," said Mariota, trembling with sudden furious rage. "How dare he slander David? I spoke in jest; he—if I mistake not—from deliberate malice. I hate Mungo."

Ludovick looked at her sorrowfully; he had not listened.

"Mariota," he said, "you know how our great-grandfather spent all his youth in Italy, living a wild and sinful life, and then came back to Rusco, broken in health and spirit, only to die of that strange incurable disease which killed my father and grandfather."

"Yes, yes," assented Mariota. "What has this to do with David Arnot?"

"Hearken. You know that our great-grandfather was the first Corsane to die in his bed of wasting sickness. Our earlier forbears died in battle, whether by sea or land; in Tuscany 'tis said one died by a poisoned rapier; but never came that fell mysterious sickness till old Cosmo brought it."

Mariota sighed impatiently. "This is a well-worn tale," she said. "I am weary. May I not sleep?"

Ludovick clutched her hand and held it in a grip that hurt her. His lips were pale.

"That sickness," he said, "was laid upon Laird Cosmo by a necromancer: a mighty wizard whose secrets he had learnt and

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threatened to disclose. And with the sickness was the curse that he and his posterity should die each one in agony, calling in vain upon God. You know well how my father died."

Ludovick shuddered. "Know you, Mariota, such disease as is created by a necromancer is utterly incurable save only by the art of necromancy. No doctor could have healed me; none but a wizard by the aid of Satan."

"Mungo told you this?" said Mariota.

Her husband bowed his head in speechless misery.

Mariota, even as a child, had always resented Mungo's sinister influence over Ludovick. Her face grew scornful.

"For my part," she said, "I credit not the Devil with such powers. Has God Almighty abdicated that you think the Devil rules the world?"

"Hush," said Ludovick; "there is yet more. 'Tis said in Italy that this foul warlock—he who ruined Cosmo's soul and body—prophesied that the curse should last one hundred years, and then the very name Corsane of Rusco be wiped out from Scotland. And therefore am I childless."

Mariota gazed at him in horror. To alienate him from David had been her deliberate purpose; but never in her wildest dreams had she foreseen such hideous complication of ideas as now obsessed him. His sudden frenzy

of terror appeared to her not only hateful but even contemptible ; yet to argue with him was futile in his present mood. In the morning she would reason with him. Meantime she had no weapons but reserve, self-control and patience.

In the morning, too, she would invoke Lord Marbrack to shut his son Mungo's mouth and stop these ancient scandals. Also she would send warning to David, though how as yet she knew not.

The wind had died down, and in the castle now there was a deathly stillness. The fire upon the hearth had sunk to a heap of ashes ; the candles had burnt low. Dawn was near ; the dawn of a day fraught with peril.

"Ludovick," said Mariota, "my head whirls with the strangeness of these things you have been saying. I must lie down and sleep."

Ludovick released her hand, and drew back the bed curtains.

"Sleep if you can," he said ; "I cannot. I will go pray ; pray God to turn His anger from us and to grant us His forgiveness. Mungo says traffic with a warlock is the unforgivable sin. Yet if we could have a son, then I would know we are forgiven and the curse broken. If I stifle my liking for David, if I never see him, never speak of him again, God may have pity."

Mariota put her hand up to her breast and

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felt for the precious amulet. Her fingers closed on it eagerly, almost convulsively.

“I must sleep now,” she repeated ; “Ludovick, put out the lights.”

And then, at last, darkness mercifully shrouded her.

CHAPTER XX

THE DREAM AND THE REALITY

WITH wide-open eyes Mariota lay tearless and motionless. The stratagem which was to have pierced through the barrier between herself and David seemed to have built that barrier anew; built it more firmly and irrevocably; dooming her to walk in a labyrinth of subterfuge and secret shame.

Neither her reason nor imagination pointed any way out of the Hell that she had made by her own actions.

But even in this extremity of anguish she was not cowardly; she did not seek to put the blame on Ludovick or David; nor upon Mungo. She accepted it herself, seeing with sudden and appalling clearness that her husband's horrible convictions—bitter, perverse and fantastic as they seemed—were but her own words literally interpreted and pressed to ultimate conclusions which though hideous were logical.

The more she faced the results of her words, the more she realised she was powerless. She could not warn David; she could not appeal to Lord Marbrack, nor enter into argument

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with Mungo ; nor could she possibly confess to her husband.

There was only one expedient ; to hide her breaking heart and tortured spirit, soothe Ludovick into forgetfulness, laugh airily at Mungo when she met him, and play the part of a happy contented wife so skilfully that Ludovick would have no thought except for her.

But even as she made this resolution her spirit and her flesh rebelled. Mingled with pity for her husband, she felt an increasing and ever more acute repugnance to him ; and blended with this agonised repugnance was the poignant consciousness how unreservedly she could have given herself to love and be loved by David, if David had not sent her into outer darkness.

There came upon her a gleam of hope which seemed like inspiration. She would wait. Such love as hers could not be destined to consume to ashes ; rather would she tend the flame and keep it like an ever-shining lamp in the dark prison of her life, until at last the time might come to break through the bars.

Then it seemed to her she slept ; and wakened in the depths of a forest on a hot still day. Only a few slanting shafts of light came in between the branches of the elms and ancient oaks which spread their gigantic roots as if to live for ever.

There was a breathless hush, broken by the

sweet fluting of a bird ; and Mariota felt her heart flutter and leap and beat itself against her breast, like a lark imprisoned, striving to fly out beyond bars into perfect freedom.

In that moment she knew that he was coming near, her first and last and only love,—the noble Roman who had David Arnot's face and David Arnot's soul. He was her life, her reality. All else was shadow, mockery, delusion ; and she had walked too long among the shadows. Now henceforth she would have sunlight and happiness.

She closed her eyes, and trembled in the intensity of joyous anticipation.

Then came a thunderbolt and smote her into icy darkness.

A bitter wind blew in upon her, seeming to freeze her very soul ; and a hand which made her gasp and shudder was pressed against her quivering bosom.

She opened her eyes and found herself in her own room at Rusco, her husband bending over her. In the grey ghostly light of the winter morning, his face haggard with sleeplessness, pale with silent grief, he seemed to her sinister, terrible, even strange.

She shivered.

Then he spoke. " Mariota, forgive me ; I was cruel to burden you with my misery last night. I now am master of myself. We will make a compact to forget the past ; never will I speak of David. I will blot the memory of

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him out of my mind and heart, and then our merciful God may pardon me for my unwitting traffic with a necromancer. You it is who saved me. From none other could I have taken a warning so harsh, so utterly repugnant. Only for love of you,—you, my wife, mine eternally—could I have renounced my friend, whom I so madly trusted,—trusted, in my folly, as if he were the noblest and best of living human creatures. And now, my Dearest, comfort me ; for to cast off David has been like tearing my very soul in twain. I am a coward, a sinner, a thickhead ; and for a while my flesh blinded my spirit. Because David's art could give me relief from pain, because he seemed to radiate a mystic healing, I thought he was a messenger of Heaven. You opened my eyes, and revealed to me that he is from Hell. Now and for ever I renounce him."

CHAPTER XXI

DOCTOR CRACKENTHORPE PRESCRIBES

IN the early spring, one cold grey day, Lady Rusco sat at dinner with her husband.

He ate heartily and talked meanwhile, casual talk about his horses and his hounds, his new white hawks from Norway, and the mating of his Spanish merlin.

Mariota listened wearily ; one moment his voice seemed to her sharp like a knife ; another moment it came muffled as if from far away.

“ O hush ! ” she said at last, “ listen to the wind, how it moans ! I hate these April storms, they seem more cruel than the winter tempests, because they come when we are tired of longing for the sunshine.”

Ludovick looked at her intently. Something in the tone of her voice perturbed him, and he noticed that she was pale and listless. She lowered her eyes, and lapsed into silence. It was small blame to Ludovick he did not understand her ; she herself could not have put in words her utter misery of mind and body.

She had scoffed at other women's ills ; she prided herself she seldom suffered from a headache, never swooned and never needed a

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physician. But now her back ached and her head throbbed till she could have wept.

Her food she left untasted ; and when she drank the French wine which had been poured for her into a silver goblet, it seemed noxiously bitter.

The wind, blowing from the sea, sent puffs of smoke into the room. The acrid fumes—blended with smells of roast venison—disgusted Mariota, and she felt as if she must soon suffocate unless she could breathe purer air.

“Why do you not eat ?” asked Ludovick, who had been watching her.

“Because I am not hungry.”

“Must I cut the meat on your plate and feed you like an infant,” he retorted, smiling. “Assuredly I shall not let you fast while I dine.”

For no apparent reason Mariota felt exasperated.

“I cannot eat,” she said ; “I beg you will not torment me.”

Ludovick put down his knife and looked at her again in perplexity.

“What is amiss ?” he asked.

“Nought is amiss,” said Mariota impatiently. “My head aches. I must rest. I shall be well in a few hours. I am never ill.”

And she rose abruptly and walked towards the door, which Ludovick reluctantly opened for her.

He stood in the doorway till she was out of sight.

On reaching the solitude of her room she locked herself in ; then, falling upon her knees beside the bed, she hid her face and trembled and sobbed. It had come upon her overwhelmingly that all the rest of her life must drag on in this dreary fashion ; ten years perhaps, or twenty, even thirty, of bondage to a man whose very presence had become repugnant to her, and whose demonstrations of affection now aroused in her a feeling of angry resentment close akin to loathing.

With trembling fingers she felt beneath her dress for Mad Elspeth's amulet which, safely hidden, was her defence and comfort ; and as she grasped it, she thanked Heaven she was at least spared the pain and irony of giving heirs to the ill-fated husband whom she could never love.

She dried her tears and then went over to the mirror ; but it brought her little comfort. With her eyelids swollen from weeping, her face pale and sullen, and her brow furrowed with the unaccustomed pain which throbbed and burned behind it, she no longer seemed beautiful.

As she looked dismayed on her own reflection, shorn thus of its grace and brilliance, she was assailed by the same sickening faintness which had come upon her as she sat with Ludovick at dinner.

She struggled to the window, flung it open to the chilly air, and gazed towards the Roman camp.

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A rising mist veiled the view beyond the river, but in imagination she saw the camp as it looked some eighteen months ago, the evening of her last ride with Doctor Arnot.

"David, David," she moaned, both hands pressed against her heart to try and still its wild tempestuous longing for his presence. The traveller starving in the desert does not crave more desperately for food than she yearned to hear his voice, even if only for a moment.

As she stood looking out she was startled by an impatient knock at the door.

Irritated at being disturbed, she crossed the room and angrily shot back the bolts.

The door was then pushed open by the hand of Ludovick.

"Mariota," he said, "I have sent for Doctor Crackenthorpe."

"I am not ill," retorted Mariota; "but I *shall* be if I am plagued by old Crackenthorpe. I hate him."

Nevertheless Doctor Crackenthorpe was sent to her, and Ludovick impatiently and rather apprehensively awaited his opinion.

The little man seemed more than usually smug and rubicund as he came out of Lady Rusco's room. He rubbed his hands together, looked coyly at the Laird, and emitted a loud purring noise.

"Well?" said Rusco sharply. "What of my Lady? A mere passing fit of vapours?"

Doctor Crackenthorpe licked his lips and looked at Rusco. "No a passing fit," said he with emphasis; "in fact her Ledyship is likely—I may say she is cairtain—to require a long course o' ma careful ministrations an' medicaments."

Rusco swore under his breath.

"Oh you doctors!" he grumbled. "You seek less to cure than to dispose of your old stock of filthy mixtures,—your dried toads and spiders and the like!"

Doctor Crackenthorpe's florid face grew redder with his righteous indignation.

"Laird," he said reproachfully, "an uncourteous greeting ye hae gi'en me for bringin' ye the brawest news ye've heerd these nine year bypast."

"Speak out," said Rusco curtly; "I have heard no news."

Doctor Crackenthorpe planted both hands on his gold-topped cane.

"I trust I mak' plain that the Ledy Rusco," he said pompously, "is like to prove, as Holy Scripture phrases it, a fruitful vine. Gie thanks unto the Lord, O Laird! Blessèd is he who hath his quiver full."

Ludovick turned pale from sheer astonishment. Though he had waited years for this, it seemed sudden now. A wave of intense emotion swept over him; and without one other word to the physician he hastened into his wife's room.

Doctor Crackenthorpe Prescribes

“Mariota, my Belovèd,” he said passionately
“at last, at last——”

And he went towards her with his arms outstretched, his eyes shining.

But Mariota shrank back.

Then, swaying blindly, she fell at his feet in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XXII

LORD MARBRACK QUOTES SCRIPTURE

“I ASSERT and affirm that David Arnot, styling himsel’ physeecian and chirurgeon, is a dangerous warlock.”

The voice of Mungo McKerlie, Younger of Marbrack, was at all times harsh and reverberant ; but as he spoke thus to his father, the President of the Court of Session, each word had the force of a blow.

Lord Marbrack, habitually cautious in speech though swift in thought, looked at Mungo with that intentness which many men found disconcerting.

His son, however, did not flinch ; hate is able to assume the mask of justice ; and Mungo was a skilful hater. Hate was to him a luxurious emotion ; without it, life had been flavourless to his palate.

“Fortunate I cam’ hame afore yon credulous fule Ludovick was dune to death. To me he owes the salvation o’ his sickly soul and body. Were he grateful enow, he should mak’ a Will and Testament to show that gin he die withoot heirs, he would bequeath to me the Tower and Fortalice and Manor Place o’ Rusco, and all the demesnes thereunto appertaining.”

Lord Marbrack quotes Scripture

Lord Marbrack frowned. Shrewd as he was at a bargain, keenly as he appreciated material advantages, Mungo's open and excessive greed for money and power had often displeased him.

"It's no for us to speir aboot Rusco's Will and Testament," he said firmly. "Ye hae nae call to covet ony kinsman's estates ; the Lord provided ye wi' a feyther nae sae ill blest i' the gude gear o' this wurd. As tae the ither matter, I'm laith to stir up the auld clavers aboot yon hoose o' Rusco and the Curse, and the warlock Laird who juist escapit burning. It's ill jesting o' ropes in the hoose o' them that has had a parent hangit ; and it's ill to blether o' warlocks to him wha had warlocks amang his ain forefeythers. Better pay the doctor a sum in gude red gowd to betak' himsel' to Padua. Better leave the Paduan foreigners to burn him, than draw Mariota and Ludovick into sic a hurlyburly. The Deil's easier to raise than to lay ! "

Mungo drooped his eyelids. He saw his vengeance slipping away from him. In Padua, under the patronage of the princely House of Cavalli, Arnot would be only the more powerful.

And yet the proposition of Lord Marbrack seemed reasonable.

"Best to conseeder," said Mungo cautiously, seeing his parent's frame of mind ; "conseeder, and pray the Lord's ain hand to point the richt

way to chastise the warlock. We'll gae cannily ; mony be the pits the Deil digs for the godly ! ”

And with this edifying utterance he rose from his seat and shut his lips tightly lest he should be tempted to say more than was yet judicious.

The conversation had taken place in Lord Marbrack's house in Edinburgh ; and Mungo walked out into the Canongate until he reached the Tolbooth. For a moment he stood looking fixedly at its sombre walls, and then he smiled to himself and showed his sharp teeth. Persecution was with him a fine art ; he prided himself he never forgave a slight, but always avenged it a hundredfold. Before the year was out he would have David Arnot lodged in one of these condemned cells ; and the strong arm of the Cavalli could not reach to Scotland.

Moreover Mungo resolved so to play his cards that not he but Ludovick should seem the main accuser. Already the poison worked in Ludovick ; and now the seeds were sown in the brain of Lord Marbrack.

Lord Marbrack, seriously perturbed by his son's assertions, was both relieved and embarrassed when the Rusco courier brought a letter announcing the arrival of Ludovick in Edinburgh.

Not two hours after the courier, Ludovick himself came asking for a private conversation.

His face was haggard as if with extreme

Lord Marbrack quotes Scripture

fatigue ; yet his eyes bespoke energy and resolution, and his first words were exultant.

“ Wish me joy, my dear kinsman, for at last my hopes and prayers are answered—or like to be answered. Mariota—— ”

He stopped abruptly, and looked round the room as if he feared to be overheard.

“ God grant it may be a son,” he said ; “ I have waited so long.”

Lord Marbrack’s face beamed with sympathy :

“ Ye bring the brawest tidings I’ve had this mony a day.”

That the news would be less pleasing to Mungo, he was aware ; but his own affection for Ludovick and Mariota spoke clearly in his voice and manner. Ludovick for a moment felt almost gay. Then a chill depression and apprehension swept over him ; and he shrank from what he felt he must say about David there and then. But he had a still more acute shrinking from the vengeance of an angry God if he faltered ; and so, in impetuous yet hesitating and broken sentences, he poured out the whole story ; not always coherently, for he was torn between his new horror of Arnot and the old loving admiration ; and even while accusing him most vehemently, he felt as if David with his noble face and fearless eyes gazed in sad reproach and astonishment and almost turned him from his purpose.

So vivid was this sensation of David’s power

to hear and see from afar, that Ludovick, stopping short in the midst of quoting Mariota's words, buried his face in his hands. He strove even to shut out the memory of this strange being who had seemed a messenger of light, but whom he now thought had been shown as a treacherous envoy from the powers of darkness.

Lord Marbrack opened a large Bible with clasps and corners of brass. Methodically he turned the pages to places where he kept ribbon markers: "Jeremiah 27-29," he muttered; "Furst Samuel 6, 2; and Second Chronicles 33, 6; but I gae maist siccarly by Exodus 22, 18, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.' And see here, Deuteronomy 14, 18, 'There shalt not be found among you . . . an Enchanter or a Witch or a Charmer, or a Consulter with Familiar Spirits, or a Wizard or a Necromancer. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord.'"

He paused. "The Holy Writ is verra plain; but the point to be established is whether the doctor falls undeniably into this category. Neyther you nor Mungo hae been bred to the law, and mebbe ye're too precipitate. And though Mariota's the bonniest wumman I've set eyne on, I'd no tak her whimsies as gospel."

"But," said Ludovick, "it is not on Mariota's sole opinion that I come to you. She grew frightened and retracted all her words and begged me to forget them. I would not have

Lord Marbrack quotes Scripture

her mentioned ; she is so innocent, so ignorant of the wickedness of the world ; and let us keep her so. In her state any excitement or agitation may imperil all my hopes. But I have been reading, unknown to her, my great-grandfather's books, and I find it established beyond question that necromancers have power to prevent conception. It is only since I cast off David for ever, and humbled myself in penitence before God, that my prayers for offspring seem like to be fulfilled. So long as David was treating me—even although he knew my wish for heirs, and bade me be of good cheer—Mariota never showed hopes of motherhood. But no sooner do I tell her I will never again see or speak to him, nor rely on any aid from him, than she conceives. It is as if by breaking away from him I by that very act have broken the evil spell."

"H'm," said Lord Marbrack.

He had not a high opinion of Ludovick's commonsense or power to discriminate the relative value of evidence ; and few things annoyed him more than to be asked for a legal opinion out of Court.

Moreover he was too much a man of the world not to be conscious that to bring the doctor to trial might expose Rusco to almost as much opprobrium for having been deceived by a necromancer as credit for now denouncing the culprit.

But Ludovick, obsessed by the one idea, and

unbalanced by agitation and want of sleep, drummed impatiently on the table with his fingers, and jerked his eyebrows up interrogatively.

Lord Marbrack was not pleased with his manner.

"Mind ye, I've no set eyne on the man," he remarked testily; "an' I'll no be wheedled into following you an' Mungo blindfold; ye're baith young, and ye're baith fules, each in yer ain fashion. Afore ye tak' ony steps it is but plain sense to hae clearer evidence."

The door swung open with a jerk and a groaning creak; and in came Mungo.

"Evidence," he exclaimed in his most forceful voice; "Evidence, Feyther? Here is evidence!"

He held up in his right hand a roll of paper, and smiled exultantly, first at Lord Marbrack, then at Ludovick.

"Ou aye," he said. "Documentary evidence. Gin ye'll tak' the time tae read it, ye'll see it's evidence eno' to burn the warlock's body and send his soul to Hell. God be praised, ma puir Ludovick, ye're saved! Manifold are the Lord's mercies tae His chosen anes."

PART FIVE

“ When from private appetite it is resolved
a Creature shall be sacrificed, it is easie to pick
up sticks enough, from any thicket whither It
hath strayed, to make a Fire to offer It with.”
—*Thomas Tenison* (1679).

CHAPTER XXIII

BY THE LAW OF THE LAND

ON the Isle of Inchmahome the Spanish chestnut trees had shed their golden leaves and stood gaunt and naked, stretching long drooping branches over the water's edge. The hills encircling the Lake had faded from glowing autumn purple to the dreary brown so soon to be enshrouded in a winter mantle of snow. The sky was leaden, and upon the waters brooded that breathless silence in which is neither repose nor peace, but rather the threat of coming storm.

In the ruined chapel of the wrecked and shattered Priory, David Arnot stood where the high altar formerly had been ; and, looking out through the broken traceries of the east window, he was oppressed by the gloom and desolation of the November landscape.

There had been a happy period when times and seasons had been powerless to affect him ; when the inner light of hope and shining aspiration had burnt steadily and clearly, irrespective of external happenings. But ever since the fatal Martinmas Eve of the previous year, when Lady Rusco cast aside all reticence

By the Law of the Land

and self-control, a dim depression pursued him.

It was not that he had fallen beneath her spell; not that he even for one moment mentally consented to link Lady Rusco with his own career now or henceforth.

And yet her recklessness, her grief, and her storm-tossed words, had wakened in him a deep pity, which hovered near him and in moments of weariness gripped his mind and heart as if with an icy hand.

He searched his memory, wondering how or when he could have spoken so as to rouse in her the strange assumption that his spirit had loved hers and wooed her in some dim forgotten era. He could recall nothing he had said which might be so interpreted; and yet when now and then in dreams her sorrow-stricken face gazed reproachfully upon him he felt a sharp remorse and a sense of poignant shame, for which in his waking life he could see no reason.

Surely he was innocent. In vain did he search his consciousness for any passionate thought, any disloyal wish, any careless look, any selfish desire. And yet, though he had resisted her at the crucial moment, the picture of that night was branded upon his brain and came between him and his work. It forced his thoughts to turn towards the age-long mystery he instinctively sought to avoid: the mystery and tragedy of man and woman. So powerful

to torment each other ; so helpless, it seemed, in the grip of inherited fatality ; so blind and groping ; yet aflame with longing for a happiness which neither, apparently, could give the other,—such were Ludovick and Mariota.

Their obscure yet significant life-drama obtruded itself more and more insistently upon David's consciousness. The wailing of the wind, the ripple of the lake, the fluting of a bird, the perfume of a flower, would often bring Mariota vividly before him, as if the winds and waters spoke with her voice.

He did not love her. Even were there no Ludovick in the world, even if she had been free as air or sunlight, free as elves and fairies of romance, she would not be the Mystical Belovèd whose spirit could be one with his, 'Cor unum, anima una.'

He recalled how some of the ancient sages believed souls in the beginning had been created, long prior to earthly bodies, as dual beings, male and female ; the male typifying Wisdom, the female Love. The blending of pure Love with selfless Wisdom had made the perfect unity, the starry and celestial harmony, even as that of angels in the highest Heaven. But this love, the vision of which had shone upon him through the sayings of Plato, Plotinus, and the sorrowing yet vigorous Empedocles, was something tranquil, divine, transcendent, connected in his thoughts not with visible union of mortal man and woman

By the Law of the Land

but rather with his sense of being an isolated exile on earth.

The exile carries his great traditions into captivity, he ministers to the other prisoners ; and in the bondage of the flesh he cherishes the deep belief that long ago he was in very truth a divine being, a Son of God ; and shall be divine again when at last his soul has learnt all its bitter lessons and has earned its freedom.

But in these thoughts Lady Rusco had no place. Rather she stood between him and his cherished vision of "that Very Beauty"—Beauty invisible, supreme, and everlasting.

David came out and strolled towards the water's edge. The lake was grey and glassy, the sky heavy and dark.

The stillness, sinister, menacing, was as if peopled with brooding presences ; non-human entities which hated and resented the mental aspirations and spiritual hopes of struggling mankind, and would have gladly whelmed in chaos the hard-won fruits of long centuries of toilsome progress.

David walked up and down, his head bent forward, his thoughts remote from his surroundings.

From the distance he heard across the silence a splash—splash ; and he looked up to see a boat put off from the shore.

Some guest or patient, he thought ; and at once went into his room to see that all was

ready for the welcome of any suffering creature who might be seeking his aid.

The sound of the oars came closer ; and in the rhythm there was something ominous as a druid's incantation.

Then silence.

Then the sound of voices ; the snapping of a branch ; footsteps ; a knocking at the door.

David had no reason for apprehension ; and yet it was with reluctance he crossed the room and opened the door which he had shut only a few moments before.

Opening it, he was confronted with faces lowering and coldly hostile.

"Your business ?" he asked laconically.

And the foremost of the group spoke in a grating voice : "David Arnot, Chirurgeon and Physician, I arrest you and declare you my prisoner."

Arnot's hand went instinctively to the place where a sword should have been.

"Under what law dare you arrest me ?" he asked.

And the reply came,—not swiftly, but with lingering deliberate emphasis :

"By the law of the land, I arrest you as a necromancer."

CHAPTER XXIV

“PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMAN”

THE sky was rose-coloured and golden, and the air clear and sparkling, on the evening Doctor Arnot rode as a prisoner into the city of Edinburgh where he had worked so many of his most signal cures.

Though the dirt of the streets, the smells and noises, seemed relatively more repulsive after the stately tranquillity of Menteith, yet the setting sun cast a glamour over the grey stone houses; and to David this afterglow seemed like a message of reassurance.

Though he entered the city on a wretched broken-winded nag, with his arms bound to his sides, and his face unshaven,—for on the journey his captors had refused him a razor,—and though glances of suspicion and scowling mistrust met him as he rode, yet he could see no reason for his arrest, and he was not seriously alarmed. He would contrive to send a message to Ludovick, who no doubt would quickly get him set free. The arrest, he thought, must be some foolish blunder of an official busybody; but Ludovick, cousin to the Lord President of the Court of Session,

would have little difficulty to dispel misunderstanding.

David assured himself that he had few if any personal enemies in Scotland. That Mungo McKerlie had returned from Italy he did not know ; nor, had he known, would he have seen any cause for McKerlie's relentless hatred.

It was true, he mused, that the orthodox medical profession had looked upon his methods dubiously ; yet, so far, his combined courtesy and firmness had carried him successfully through every difficult encounter with the members of the Faculty. Usually his mere presence had been enough to silence opposition, even though not always to carry conviction.

The open acrimonious jealousy foretold by the Paduan Master had never yet manifested itself in any powerful shape ; and David therefore, serene in his own integrity and impersonal aims, regarded his present dilemma as a provoking episode : not any serious menace.

The vague apprehension and depression which had so often beset him in dreams, and in thoughts of Mariota, did not now affect him ; for though women had always been a mystery, he knew well from experience how to deal with men.

Therefore when he dismounted in front of the Canongate Tolbooth, and even when he was led into a miserable-looking cell, the sudden melancholy he felt was not due to fear for himself, but rather to sympathy for others who

"Passing the Love of Woman"

might be in bondage for offences which could not be explained away, nor expiated except by penalty and pain.

Afterwards, looking back upon his feelings, David marvelled at the unnatural calm which had enveloped him up to the very moment when almost casually he asked the fatal question :

"Who," he said to those who lodged him in the prison, "who accuses me ? "

The answer came deliberately yet forcibly :
"Corsane o' Rusco."

David was physically extremely strong ; yet at these words his knees trembled ; a quivering anguish tore at his heart and poured through his veins ; and in that moment he felt as if his spirit had been stabbed through and through.

His captors, watching him intently, took his sudden pallor for a sure sign of guilt. The expression of their faces made this manifest ; so Doctor Arnot roused himself resolutely as from a nightmare.

"Rusco ? " he said. " You dream. Corsane of Rusco is my most intimate friend. It is to him I would ask you to send a messenger to say I am here. He will explain your error."

The grim faces met his with a glare of disgust. His unconsciously proud words exasperated them. His manner they thought unbecoming in a criminal. And something in his appearance,—for unshaven, bound, and travel-worn as he was, his distinction was

manifest,—appeared to their eyes as evidence of how the Devil gives spurious majesty to those who serve him. That it was the majesty of innocence, the princeliness of noble purpose, they did not for a moment suspect.

They had never seen a prisoner resembling this doctor; and as he was outside their experience he was the more assuredly from Satan.

So they inwardly reasoned; but they discreetly forbore to argue. They began, in fact, to feel afraid what pressure the Devil might bring in favour of his minion.

There was a silence. Then the door was violently slammed; a key groaned and creaked; and David was left alone.

Night came on; darkness; but not quietness, for passers-by could be heard in the street, stumbling over the swine which grunted among the refuse. And there were sounds of drunken songs, scufflings, and curses; and an occasional sickly glimmer of light from horn lanterns as David stood and looked through the narrow window.

He examined the bars. They were utterly immovable.

But what matter? For had the bars been taken away and the door wide open he would not have escaped. To fly from slander and false accusation would have been contrary to his every instinct, even had it been practicable.

“Passing the Love of Woman”

No. He would confront all accusers ; silence all opposition.

That his accuser could really have been Ludovick, his brain now refused to believe ; Ludovick to whom he was dearer than a brother, Ludovick who prized him above all living men. David felt ashamed that even for an instant he had accepted this preposterous assertion about Ludovick, before the calm justice of his mind had time to refute it.

The noise and turmoil in the Canongate waxed and waned ; till at last it seemed that sleep settled upon the entire city. But David could not sleep. No food had been brought to him, and the pangs of hunger and thirst were insistent.

With the strong man's instinctive impulse to try and conquer pain by action, he paced his cell ; but it was small as a cage ; and after a while he lay down on a heap of dirty straw.

His captors had not manacled him ; but neither had they unbound his arms, and the ropes were tight and his discomfort acute.

What troubled him most was that even for a moment he could have believed it had been Ludovick who had denounced him. He was mortified to recall how he trembled when the words “ Corsane o' Rusco ” had smitten on his ears.

His reason revolted against such foolishness ; and his heart throbbed with increasing devotion to Ludovick. So it ever is with any generous

mind which thinks it has been startled into a momentary injustice. David longed for the instant when he could see Ludovick again; for though Ludovick was no warrior, and David was no slayer of visible Goliaths, yet he loved Ludovick even as his namesake David the predestined King of Israel had loved Jonathan,—with a love passing the love of woman.

“Passing the love of woman”; David meditated and wondered; what was this love of woman that so many men had been ready to squander manhood, freedom, honour and even the hope of Heaven to attain so double-edged and bitter a joy? Helen, Cleopatra, Yseult,—what had been the fatal fascination of these women who brought woe and disaster on all who loved them?

But his friendship with Ludovick, he believed, was the house built on the rock; no woman’s hand could mar its steadfast fidelity.

And so with these thoughts David cheered the long night of sleeplessness; and when the cold and darkness seemed to bite into his veins and muscles, he rose again from his prison bed of straw, paced the cage-like cell, and said over and over again in his mind, “The darkest hour is the hour before dawn.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE QUESTION

A WEEK had passed since David Arnot had been incarcerated in the Canongate Tolbooth ; and now Lady Rusco stood at the window of her husband's house in Edinburgh ; looking out with fixed unseeing gaze, leaning against the stone sill.

There was a confused noise of voices, footsteps, and the snorting of the inevitable swine among the refuse heaps. Every sound smote upon Mariota's consciousness like the lash of a whip on uncovered flesh.

She shrank and shuddered, but had neither will nor energy to turn away and shut the window. The foggy outer air, and the filthy street, at least refrained from mocking her with a show of cheerfulness ; whereas there seemed to be a callous gaiety in the dancing of the flames on the hearth.

She was standing in a deep recess formed in the thickness of the wall and opening from the inner room by an ill-fitting oaken door on iron hinges. A reading stand and a large Bible—wooden backed and brazen clasped—formed the entire furnishing of the recess.

As Lady Rusco stood there, looking out into the Canongate, she heard a heavy and measured footstep on the stair; and then another step which she knew as Ludovick's.

A panic seized her, and instinctively she closed the door so that it shut her out from sight. She hoped her husband would only look into the room; and seeing it empty, would go out.

He entered slowly, preceded by Lord Marbrack; and Mariota to her dismay could hear them pull up chairs close to the fire and begin to talk in undertones.

Though lacking courage to disclose herself, her pride revolted against playing the eaves-dropper. She leant her aching head on the open Bible on the stand, and covered both ears. But to hold up her arms made her feel sick and giddy, so she dropped them wearily by her sides, and at that moment she heard Lord Marbrack's voice:

"Thankye, I'll tak' a tass o' wine; I'm no sae young as I used tae be, and I hae spent a maist fatiguing forenoon."

Ludovick's reply was lost in the rumble of wheels on the coble stones outside; but Marbrack's forcible voice sounded above the din:

"Torture? Aweel, what else? Ye ken the law o' the land."

Mariota held her breath and listened with dreadful premonition.

There was a moment of oppressive silence.

The Question

Then came Marbrack's voice again :

"The Deil's ain fascination hangs subtle and inveesible aboot the prisoner. I had to keep a tight grip o' ma wuts, or I'd hae been taking the warlock's pairt against ma wull. Eh, eh, a bonnie mon is yer sorcerer ; or was—I should hae said—afore the Question. The verra knaves that stripped him for the rack decleered they'd rarely seen a finer figure."

Mariota leant her head against the stone wall and shuddered. She shut her eyes ; but Marbrack's words had wakened her to so acute an inner vision that the whole scene of the torture chamber branded itself on her heart and brain even as a red hot iron might have branded its mark upon her trembling body.

She heard Ludovick's voice, husky and agitated.

"Once, when discussing law and equity, I spoke to Arnot about torture, and I was full mazed to see him turn as pale as any woman. He who unshrinking could perform astounding operations in chirurgery, was agitated at the merest passing mention of judicial torment."

"Aye, aye," said Marbrack ; " manifold are the powers o' Satan. Nane o' us wad like the rack for oorsels ; but ye ken fine how the Deil gies siccan as worship him a superhuman strength o' body an' unconquerable stubbornness o' mind. Oor ministers an' lawyers testify to that ; and a' our best physeecians wad

depone that flesh and blood—unaided by diabolic influence—canna thole the rack, the which with honest folk is a gran' loosener o' tongues. But though we racked this Doctor Arnot till he swooned, nae word o' confession or penitence cud we wring oot o' him; sae we jalouse he's under Satan's maist especial charge."

Lord Marbrack's voice, deliberate as if in Court, penetrated to Mariota with such terrible distinctness that she seemed to hear it not with her ears alone but with each nerve and fibre. It seemed to her that she herself lay bound upon the rack, in an extremity of shame, anguish, and an unutterable terror.

A stifled moan escaped from her; and Ludovick, with staring eyes and blanching face, started up and listened.

Lord Marbrack, who was somewhat deaf, had not heard any sound.

"Sit doon, ye fulish fellow," he said. "Dinna stare as if ye saw a bogle."

Ludovick paced up and down the room.

"Is it possible," he said, "that we may be mistaken; and that Arnot's courage comes from God?"

"Na, na," protested the President of the Court of Session, "siccan a notion is maist pestilent heresy."

Again a silence. Mariota pressed both hands over her heart.

Then came Marbrack's voice in tones which sounded almost cheerful.

The Question

“I’m a’ for gieing him anither chance to free hissel’ frae Satan’s clutches. The Question is to be resumed the morn; an’ gin’ he confesses—e’en at the eleventh hour—I’ll no say but that he maunna yet be saved frae the eternal fires o’ Hell. But I’m thinkin’ he’s sae obstinate we’ll a’ be weary ere the day’s dune. Mungo counsels the special form o’ torture used on the murderers o’ James the Furst.”

From Ludovick came a confused murmur.

To Mariota, blinded by a sudden rush of tears and almost suffocated by the frenzied throbblings of her heart, Lord Marbrack’s next words were not audible. But she heard Ludovick exclaim, “Good God!” Then there was an awful silence, in which the air seemed quivering with vibrations of acute anguish.

Mariota’s knees gave way beneath her; and she sank on the floor, and crouched there with her eyes shut and her hands clenched.

But it was in vain to shut her eyes; for even as she shut them there flashed upon her memory the pictures which in her childhood had excited her indignant loathing; pictures which Ludovick had shown her in a large folio *Book of Martyrs*. She remembered how, turning sick with horror, in a passion of disgust, she had hurled the book into the river.

And Ludovick had laughed.

He was not laughing now. She could hear him groan.

“Dinna be sae niff-naffy,” said Lord Mar-

brack ; “ there’s nae need to be moanin’ ; for in point o’ fact I hae refused that Queen’s ensample. It was she, ye ken, devised thae oogsome torments ; a wumman’s thirst for vengeance is mair easily roused than slaked ; and she had loe’d the King ; sae she juist rejoiced to see his slayers mutilated,—torn and mangled till the verra mithers that had borne them scarce knew ane from tither. I’ll no say but that she had great provocation ; yet in oor gentle age we shrink frae sic barbarities. I’ll no hae this Arnot subjected to ony but the regulation torture, as by law appointed to be used upon the persons o’ a’ warlocks, necromancers, traitors an’ the like. But come awa’, an’ dine wi’ Mungo an’ masel. Ye’re no lookin’ sae weel the day ; ye’re moped. Come awa’.”

Mariota heard them cross the room. It seemed to her they were treading her heart under their feet.

She strove to pray, but she could only weep in blind speechless agony ; such frantic agony of body and despair of mind that for the moment she believed she must have died and sunk into Hell. These, then, were the eternal torments McClorg had threatened.

There surged up in her heart a furious anger against God who thus delighted in the helpless writhings of damned souls.

A cart rumbled over the stones below. She heard the driver cracking his whip and swearing

The Question

at his horse ; and the familiar sound brought back to her the consciousness of where she was.

She dragged herself up from the ground, and put her hands out groping. The fog was darkening outside, and it had rolled in through the window and enveloped her.

Even so, a thick mist of despair enveloped her soul.

The clock ticked with a maddening insistence ; it seemed to say, "No matter how you suffer now, there is worse to come."

CHAPTER XXVI

“WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLAIRGY”

NEXT morning, at dim chilly daybreak, the long-desired son and heir of Corsane of Rusco made entrance into the world, a couple of weeks too soon ; and Mariota went down to the verge of death.

The child lived only a few moments, and the most skilled of Edinburgh physicians asserted and reasserted that the necromancer David Arnot was responsible ; in precedent for which they cited learned utterances of at least a score of scholars, legislators, and yet more divines.

Necromancers and witches, it was well attested, next to amorous encounters with an “incubus” or “succubus,” loved nothing better than to blast the offspring of honest folk.

Had any man in Scotland questioned David Arnot’s guilt, the death of Lady Rusco’s baby would have swept away the last doubt.

The news spread quickly through the town ; and even drunken beggars, dozing in the gutter, lifted their heads and muttered sleepily, “God

"Without Benefit of Clairgy"

curse the necromancer! Burn him! Burn him!"

Meanwhile David lay on a heap of mouldering straw in one of the smallest and coldest cells of the Canongate Tolbooth. He had been carried there the previous day in a deep swoon, but his tormentors had not allowed him to rest long in merciful unconsciousness. With wine forced down his throat and water dashed on his face he had been brought back to realisation of his terrible position.

They had clasped fetters on his hands and chained his feet together; but they might have saved themselves the trouble. Had the prison doors been open and a rescue waiting him outside, he could not have availed himself of proffered freedom; the "gentle Question" had so dealt with him that it was now beyond the bounds of possibility for him to stand or walk. And so he lay completely at the mercy of his gaolers.

They, having orders never to let him sleep — because in sleep "the souls of necromancers can be spirited away by Satan and mysteriously fortified," — came every now and then and shook him to make certain he was awake.

Then they would go to their bench under the window and chat together, chewing tobacco the while, and spitting copiously.

David turned his face to the wall, but kept his eyes wide open. His features were set like

a mask ; for, though he suffered unspeakable pain, his courageous pride would not allow that his tormentors should remark and glory in it.

But he could scarcely believe that only twenty-four hours ago he had been strong in body beyond the average of men ; and resolutely hopeful of winning the Court of Session to recognise his innocence.

He had gone forth expecting to vanquish calumny and ignorance. He was accustomed to success, and not for a moment would he think of failure. Only yesterday when he had stepped out into the street, between two warders,—dark lowering faces scowling on him from the gutters, thronging at the entrance to the Closes, following him, jeering at him, shrieking round him,—he had faced the crowd with a dauntless spirit. Such was his consciousness of strength, he felt ready to confront the world : “ Great is Truth, and shall prevail.”

In Court the queries put to him had been so manifestly foolish that he had actually smiled when brushing them aside in an urbanely contemptuous negative. Had he not a familiar spirit in the shape of a black cat ? Did he not attend the Witches’ Sabbath ? Had he enjoyed favours of sylphs and salamanders, water-sprites and fairies ? After what fashion were these creatures courted ? Could he raise storms and tempests to wreck ships at will ? Was it

“Without Benefit of Clairgy”

not his habit to cast spells and put enchantments upon any man or woman who crossed his purpose?

While these preposterous questions were all formally propounded, David had felt Lord Marbrack's eyes upon him.

Trusting to Marbrack's noted shrewdness, he had congratulated himself that there was at least one rational minded man upon the Bench, and that one man the President of the Court.

He had been utterly amazed when Marbrack decreed that he be forthwith tested by the “Question.”

In the hours that followed, he had undergone such frightful agony that he marvelled how he could have endured it and be living. It had transformed him from a young and hopeful man,—aglow with energy and noble aspiration—into a broken-hearted wreck.

On the rack, despite his show of fortitude, so immeasurably horrible were his sufferings that he had been almost tempted to confess the crimes imputed to him, thus to secure a speedy condemnation and win by death a respite from the cruelty of men.

The temptation had been born of excruciating anguish; but though he had conquered it, he still felt humiliated to the dust. It seemed to him that never throughout eternity would he forget that he had flinched, and had come so near to perjury.

This was the thought that lay in wait for him when he came back to consciousness ; this was the thought that weighed upon him all through a sleepless night of hideous desolation ; and he wondered how he would face the day that lay before him. Would he be assailed by the same terrible temptation ; and, if so assailed, could he be sure that he would have courage to resist ?

As this doubt and dread were beating upon his brain and racking anew every fibre of his body and soul, a key turned in the lock. There surged up in David's heart a hope that Ludovick was coming to visit him.

The door was heavy and swung back very slowly ; but it was not Ludovick who entered ; alas, not Ludovick, but Ludovick's chaplain.

The Reverend McClorg showed the warders a written paper. They nodded and went outside.

David's veins throbbed with fresh jerks of pain ; for the grim satisfaction on the face of McClorg was not the expression of one bringing a message of hope to the calumniated ; but rather the triumph of an Inquisitor rejoicing in the blasting of a sinner.

David spoke first :

" Pardon me that I cannot rise to greet you. I thank you for your coming. You bring tidings of Rusco and his Lady ? "

“ Without Benefit of Clairgy ”

McClorg was scandalised by what seemed disgraceful levity.

“ Rusco’s distraught. Leddy Rusco’s bairn’s deid. The Laird and Leddy baith ken ye,—ye warlock,—for the murderer o’ the puir wee infant.”

David shrank appalled before this new and astounding charge. His horror and anguish were visible in his face. That Ludovick could think this of him was more bitter and frightful than any bodily torture. It wounded him to the depths of his soul.

McClorg, seeing the expression of his face, took it as a further proof of guilt.

“ Spawn o’ Satan,” he said ; “ thae wicked cantrips wi’ the Enemy of Mankind are accurst o’ God, and maun bring ye to death an’ everlasting fire.”

“ Listen to me,” said David ; “ I am grieved beyond measure that this calamity has come on Rusco. Tell him I sorrow with and for him.”

McClorg’s grim face grew grimmer ; and he looked down at the prisoner as at a reptile.

“ The Deil’s the feyther o’ lies,” he said. “ Add lie to lie, an’ ye sink the deeper into the pit. To confess the sin wad be the act o’ a man ; but to deny it and pretend to sorrow,—’tis the hypocrisy o’ the auld Serpent himsel’ ! ”

“ But,” pleaded David, “ how could I have killed the child ? And you must know I desire the utmost welfare of Rusco.”

McClorg's contempt and disgust deepened. "I ken fine," he said, "that heathen nigromancers and warlocks by the power o' their wicked wull can ca' up evil spirits to blast the offspring o' the Lord's ain children. The seed o' the Serpent bears age-long enmity to the seed o' the wumman. How daur ye still deny it?"

David looked up in despair; he and McClorg spoke a different language; and though he could understand McClorg's theology, McClorg he felt, would never comprehend his.

In the depths of his helpless loneliness, confronted with this bigot,—who, although of his own race and era, yet seemed as remote from him as a being of a different order of creation,—he saw, with strangely dispassionate clarity, that McClorg was honest. The fault was less in the minister's heart than in his narrow mind. Though he had so often scolded and admonished Rusco and Rusco's wife, though he had threatened Hell-fire to both if they should wander from the paths he himself marked, though he was in his own fashion a bully and tyrant, yet he was truly attached to the Laird and Lady. The look in his eyes, when he had spoken of the dead child, brought to David a realisation that this rasping-voiced fanatic had indeed some human feelings; but these feelings were all concentrated on the Corsanes of Rusco.

David made one last desperate effort.

“ Without Benefit of Clairgy ”

“ Mister McClorg,” he said, “ I see you do truly believe of me the evil thing you say. But, before God, I adjure you to recognise you are mistaken. As you hope for justice yourself at the Last Day, tell me when have you ever known me wish ill to any human being, that you condemn me now ? ”

McClorg shook his head. “ I cam’ here,” he answered sternly, “ to hear ye confess yer sin ; but sae obstinat’ and unrepentant do I find ye that I’ll no gie ye ony mair occasion to deave me wi’ yer blasphemies.”

David’s brain reeled ; the cell for a moment became darkened to his eyes ; but he struggled so that physical faintness might not overcome him.

“ As you love and fear God, beg Rusco to come and speak with me,” he said. “ And, if he will not come, I charge you to tell him I die innocent of any of the cruel thoughts and actions imputed to me.”

He put forth the whole force of his will in frantic effort to pierce the darkness of McClorg’s mind.

But the answer came, fiercely inexorable.

“ Ye’ll no see Rusco mair,—neyther in this wuld nor the wuld beyond the tomb. ‘ The wages o’ sin is death ’ ; an’ for unrepentant murderers and shameless warlocks, children o’ Hell, the law decrees death withoot benefit o’ clairgy ; and after death, the everlasting furnace. I cam’ tae ye—ootcast tho’ ye be—

David Arnot

tae gie ye ane last chanst tae dee in the truth, to
dee remorsefu' ; cryin' upon God for mercy.
Contumacious and stiffnecked, yer fate is on
yer ain heid ; and God Himsel' condemns ye
through me His holy meenister."

CHAPTER XXVII

JUDGMENT

It was two days before Christmas ; and four weeks after the birth and death of Lady Rusco's baby. Twice again the "necromancer" had been tortured, but no confession could be extracted from him.

Even on the rack he would not abate his claim to be regarded as Rusco's best friend ; and he had the determination, or, as was commonly said, the effrontery, to repeat his demand that he should see and speak with Rusco and clear up what he persisted in calling a "misunderstanding."

His unwavering attitude, far from impressing any of the spectators with a realisation of his courage and innocence, on the contrary deepened their conviction that he was under special protection of the Prince of Darkness.

The final day of his prolonged trial excited much interest but little anxiety. The verdict was a foregone conclusion ; but the majesty of the law demanded that all due formalities should be observed.

Lord Marbrack had reserved the chief witnesses to the last. His idea had been to give

the prisoner, up to the eleventh hour, a fair chance to confess. Then if he remained obstinate, bring to bear on him the statements of Mungo and Ludovick.

This 23rd of December was bitterly cold, with a mist coming up from the sea, and the skies darkened in threat of an approaching tempest.

Braziers of red hot coals were brought into Court to keep the Judges warm; and the windows were all shut tightly.

Rusco and Mungo McKerlie, waiting to be called, were wrapped in fur-lined cloaks, Together they walked up and down the empty Parliament House; and McKerlie in his usual rasping voice, discoursed on the pestilent heresy of witchcraft and the crying need to uproot it without allowing personal feeling to impede public justice.

Ludovick appeared to listen; but the words beat on his head like so many blows, and confused rather than stimulated his brain. The situation had become an agony to him. Stubbornly bent on doing his duty as laid down by Mungo,—for Mungo now had entirely regained over his susceptible mind an old ascendancy dating back to their boyhood,—Ludovick none the less yearned and hungered for a word alone with David. But Mungo declared this was an iniquitous craving, which must be resisted.

Judgment

Ludovick dreaded confronting David in Court before a crowd of curious spectators ; and his heart, torn in two between his former friendship and his recent disgust and terror, throbbed and jerked until it caused him physical pain.

McKerlie, divining something of his emotion, gave him no chance to waver.

“ Juist hold in yer mind the thought o’ God’s hot anger an’ ye be sae weak as tae pit a private sentiment afore a duty tae the whole o’ Scotland ; and, aboon a’, a duty tae yer ain bonnie wife and future bairns. Gin ye will no see this warlock destroyed, gin ye will no pit awa’ a’ pity for him, y’ll be fause to yer kinsfolk and yer God.”

Ludovick did not reply ; he felt driven like a rudderless pinnacle. Mungo’s words overpowered him with a sense of hopeless anguish ; and the power of his will—so obstinate a moment ago—seemed broken. It was as if he were drowning in an ocean of misery ; all his faculties deserting him.

“ Puir Ludovick,” said Mungo genially ; “ puir Ludovick, ye’ve been sair deceived ; but praise be to the grace o’ God—manifested through me His bedesman—ye’re saved ! ”

At this moment they were called into Court ; and went downstairs, where the trial had been taking place.

Ludovick walked as in a nightmare ; he was ghastly pale and his limbs trembled.

He was so dazed that at first when he entered

the Court-room his eyes were unable to focus themselves on the scene before him. He felt rather than saw the face of David.

As questions were put to him he answered mechanically, without understanding what he was saying. The sound of his own voice came as if from far away; and several times he stammered and hesitated.

This confusion was attributed to the diabolic power of the prisoner's eyes, which even the Judges had found disconcerting.

After being degraded to the dust, after torture which had left only the wreck of a man's body, this doctor was not yet humbled. Though he could not stand to face his accuser; though he was bound to a chair with ropes across his breast, to keep him from falling if he were to swoon, yet—bound and doomed as he was—his eyes looked out unflinchingly; and his face, though aged a score of years in as many days, showed no sign of penitence or abasement; only a strange aloofness of expression which exasperated the onlookers.

As for Ludovick, while he spoke he wondered could David be exerting supernatural arts to win back his affection, for suddenly he had been impelled by an almost overpowering desire to spring forward, sever the ropes, defy the Court, and vindicate David even at the cost of accusing Mungo and himself.

His head whirled and spun, and his ears buzzed.

Judgment

"This is madness," he thought, "madness, and the warlock's vengeance."

Lord Marbrack, seeing him shrink and shudder, concluded it was time to cut the evidence short before the witness broke down completely.

Moreover, enough had been said.

There was a silence ; and even to Ludovick's bewildered brain it was apparent that if the prisoner had had any chance of acquittal previously, he now had none.

Yet Ludovick could not recall by what words and statements he had incriminated David. All he knew was that David and he would never meet again ; and that David's eyes would haunt him eternally, and rob him of peace for ever.

"And this," he thought, "is the punishment for having trusted a cursed wizard !"

But when he got out into the street a sudden revulsion of feeling rent him. From curses he passed to prayers ; and his eyes smarted with tears, blinding him, and yet not shutting out the picture of David's eyes, in which had shone so much sorrow, so much proud innocence, so much forgiveness, that Ludovick moaned to himself, "Oh, how can Satan have power to fashion envoys who seem like angels of light ? God forgive me. God ! God ! Release me from this terrible obsession. Better a broken heart now, than eternal Hell hereafter."

After Ludovick had left the court, David held his head higher. The worst bitterness of death was past. And when Mungo McKerlie confronted him with a wolfish smile of triumph, he felt little of the dread he had felt at Padua; but in its place an extraordinary calm.

The blow had fallen; there was no more room for fear, but only for endurance. After the desertion, mendacity, and cruel ingratitude of Ludovick, what power had any foe to wound? Only a friend knows where to strike the inmost spirit. Enemies can but attack the body and blast the earthly reputation; but a friend can stab the very soul, leaving an open wound to go on bleeding till the end of the world.

David listened with dispassionate attention while Mungo McKerlie was making a speech in answer to interrogations.

McKerlie had read out, from a scroll in his hand, a long list of what he termed "proven illicit cures"; but to these David had paid little heed, as the Court the week before had brought up similar instances, had called witnesses, and striven to entrap him into confession of employing magic potions and supernatural agencies.

He saw his condemnation had been decided upon, and that this final cross-examination was merely a matter of form. His defence he had made on the previous occasions; and the

Judgment

nore logical, more incisive, more eloquent he had been, the sterner had waxed the Lord President and all the Judges.

So on this, the final day, David had preserved unbroken silence.

"I depone," the loud and grating voice of McKerlie was saying, "I depone that in Padua he prisoner was sae universally known and execrated as a warlock that he cudna gang through the piazzas withoot being stoned by the verra infants o' the populace. He fled frae Padua to Scotland when he saw that no e'en the strang hand o' the Prince Cavalli cud protect him frae the righteous anger o' the Paduan citizens."

Arnot, who during the speech had been looking into space in front of him, now turned his eyes upon the speaker; and then, as at Padua, it was McKerlie who for a moment looked disconcerted.

Bound, helpless, doomed as the doctor was, yet McKerlie saw in his eyes the same steadfast strength which first roused his jealous anger.

He frowned and coughed. A most inadequate revenge he seemed to have taken, when even now he could not make this fellow quail or lower his eyes.

"In the name of God," repeated McKerlie, raising his voice almost to a shout, to cover his uneasiness, "in the name o' Jehovah, Lord God o' Israel, in whose eyne we Scots are the chosen people, even as the Jews aforetime, I

challenge this human instrument o' Satan to answer for his secret sins and murders an' foul nigromancies ; and to deny, gin he daur, that he has witched ma kinsfolk, the Laird and Leddy o' Rusco and their offspring."

David then spoke ; not to McKerlie but to Lord Marbrack :

"The only 'witchery' I used to cure Corsane of Rusco was the skill and knowledge I had acquired under the most famed physician in Padua. I have explained to the Court the peculiarities of the Laird of Rusco's case, and the names, nature, and proportion of the remedies I employed. To repeat my words would only detain your Lordships to no purpose. As to this witness who depones to having heard me cried upon as a necromancer in the Paduan streets, I have him to thank for teaching that epithet to the unlearned. A more reliable witness of my career in Italy would be my Master, the Doctor Ilario Cavalli ; and I have already offered to produce his written statements, and those of the Prince Cavalli, as to my character and capacity."

At this, one of the Judges leant over and spoke to Lord Marbrack in an audible aside :

"The warlock offers to produce evidence o' ane ither warlock black as himsel'. Dinna touch the papers o' the foreigners. Depend on't, thae documents maun be enchanted ; poisoned, like as no, and as dangerous as the Borgia wine. Gin ye'l no conclude the trial,

Judgment

ma Lord President, the wizard'll bewitch us a' into prolonging it, till we be worn to threads an' shadows."

Lord Marbrack frowned; his colleague's solid person looked in little danger of being worn to a shadow, or even reduced to elegant proportions; and the President acutely resented unsolicited opinions.

Nevertheless, he was now so absolutely convinced of Arnot's guilt that he saw nothing to be gained by listening to Mungo any longer. Therefore he looked sternly upon the prisoner, and sternly upon the Court; and in his clear powerful voice he summed up the case.

It was afterwards remarked that he had phrased it in general terms, and had not alluded to the Ruscos:

"It has been proven that the prisoner has performed mony unprecedented cures; for the whilk the maist eminent o' the faculty can find nae explanation except witchcraft. It has been credibly reported by a person o' quality that even afore he began his practice here in Scotland, he was publicly rebuked in Italy for his nigromancy. The law o' God is plain; 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.' The law o' the land decrees that he be tied to a stake at the Grassmarket and burnt alive in a slow fire; and his bones an' ashes scattered to the winds, sae that at the Resurrection Day, when his soul shall rise for a brief space oot o' the pit an' stand before God's Judgment Seat,

David Arnot

it shall rise naked in all its accursèd wickedness."

In Lord Marbrack's voice there was the force of a good man's impersonal condemnation of evil as he pronounced these scathing words.

David looked at him unflinching; not in anger, but in deep sorrow, for he knew Lord Marbrack to be an honourable man, respected for the justice of his judgments.

As their eyes met, Lord Marbrack for one instant felt the same unaccountable sinking at his heart as he had felt before; and this made him rally his will power the more resolutely. He would not be enchanted by those piercing reproachful eyes.

"Servant o' Lucifer the Fallen Angel," he said; "ye stand condemned not only by this earthly Court but afore God's ain Might and Majesty. The time for mercy has gane by. The time for inexorable justice has come. As ye burn in the fire on earth, sae will ye burn hereafter,—all through eternity."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Joy and merriment, so the most pious folk of Edinburgh had often said, were wanton and ungodly. Beauty, music, art, all those delights were subtle snares of Satan. But the burning of a wizard, one who dared to heal an incurable disease, one who by the help of Beelzebub had wrought many signs and wonders, and who, moreover, it was credibly asserted, played strange magic tunes on lute and harp and sang to them his wicked incantations, surely the punishment of such a sin-stained wretch would be "a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God."

So asserted the Reverend Ezra McClorg; so vociferated the populace; so had believed the College of Justice; and so—with some reluctance as we have seen—Lord Marbrack had become convinced. But if as sturdy a spirit as Marbrack's had been capable of fear, he would have feared for his own soul's safety in that his heart had sunk so unaccountably even while he doomed the prisoner. And now he could not put the case out of his mind, nor forget the doctor's eyes. Doubtless it was from Satan that this condemned criminal

acquired that princely dignity which made him seem a being of a higher race than common men. But the Devil was an Archangel long ago, before he fell from Heaven; and if in David Arnot's sorrowful proud face there was something of the fallen angel, all the more did he merit sternest condemnation.

So repeated Lord Marbrack inwardly; and so he said to Ludovick, and to Mungo.

Ludovick groaned:

"Alas, even now his spell is still upon me; my heart cries out that he is pure, noble, magnanimous, seeking only to bring comfort to the suffering and unfortunate. But I know the heart of man is desperately wicked, and each day I wrestle in prayer and strive to root up this devil-born love which binds me to a warlock."

"Eh," said Lord Marbrack hastily, "but the spell maun break to-morrow, when the warlock's body'll be burnt to ashes, and his soul'll go back to his maister, Satan."

The clock struck nine; the night was cruelly cold; the wind hissed and shrieked as if with exultant voices of a thousand evil spirits.

Mariota knelt by her bed in prayer; but her prayer was a cry of anger. "O God, cruel God! Why hast Thou created us?"

And she wept and trembled, while her head throbbed and burned, and her heart seemed

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frozen as a lump of ice in a breast racked with excruciating anguish.

Ludovick had gone out ; but where he had gone she neither knew nor wished to know. All she craved was to be alone, where no human being could witness her agony of remorse and shame.

For the fact of her love she did not feel shame. To love the best and highest—this rather was her secret pride. But her soul fainted within her at the thought that it was she—she who so worshipped love, she whose heart cried out for sympathy and understanding, she whose loneliness of spirit was a torture more bitter and terrible than a thousand deaths—that it was she who, in loving David Arnot, had brought about his ruin.

She had only wanted to be happy and to make him happy ? How had she let loose upon him all the horrors of earth and Hell ?

By words,—mere hasty words.

How could she foresee that from such small beginnings so terrible an end would grow ?

Thus—like many another woman then and now—she strove to defend herself to herself ; “ I did not think,—I did not mean—— How could I know—— ? ”

And the wind howled and roared, dashing itself against the windows, as if to shatter them and beat in furiously upon Mariota’s quivering body and tormented spirit.

"God," she said, "God ; God. Forgive. Have mercy !"

Then there came a hush around her. She could still hear the storm, but it seemed to come from far away.

It was as if a gentle hand were laid on her brow, and deep in her soul a voice said, "Atone ! Atone !"

She rose from her knees. A weight had fallen off her heart. Swift as a lightning flash she saw it was not yet too late.

She would go to Lord Marbrack, and confess all the truth, humbling herself lower than the dust ; and David should go free, nor ever know until the Last Day how it was that she had bought his freedom.

Then, at the end of the world she would see him face to face, and say, "I have atoned."

It was four minutes before ten ; and Lord Marbrack was trimming a guttering candle when there was a knock at the door. A red-faced and shrewd-eyed serving man announced in a discreet whisper, "A wumman to see the Lord President. A leddy I jalouse, but she's her sha'al rowed roun' her that way that I'm no shair."

He held out a letter ; and Lord Marbrack broke the seal and tore it open.

Its contents amazed him.

"My Cousin, my dear Lord,
I must see you now, alone, secretly ; on

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a matter of life and death.

I have to tell you strange and terrible things.
You only can help me."

Lord Marbrack, to his surprise, felt the same sinking of the heart as when he had passed sentence upon David Arnot; but his face remained impassive as he said, "Aye, I'll see the wumman noo. Bring her in."

The wind rose again with a screech and shook the curtains drawn across the windows. It blew the candle flames aslant; three of the candles guttered, hissed, and went out.

The door opened and closed again; and in the middle of the room stood Mariota.

She threw back her plaid and faced Lord Marbrack resolutely. Her face was set and white; but her eyes glittered and scintillated with the light of such unbreakable determination that Lord Marbrack was startled. What had come upon the languorous Mariota, whose impatience used to lapse so quickly into apathy, and whose husband had declared her passionless; Mariota who had preserved into maturity the heart of a child?

"Sit ye doon, dearie," he said, "and tell me a' about it. Is it Ludovick sick and weary? He'll be better the morn."

But Mariota did not sit down.

"No," she said, "not Ludovick; but I. Sick to death with remorse, I have come to

you to confess. Listen, and hear me to the end."

In all his long career Marbrack had seldom been more astonished.

He led her to a chair, trimmed and re-lighted three of the candles, and seated himself opposite to her, his keen blue eyes fixed rigidly yet kindly on her.

"You must be told before it is too late," said Mariota. "David Arnot is no warlock. It was I who accused him to Ludovick; I spoke in haste and wrath; and Ludovick, misled by Mungo, would not listen to me when I strove to tell him I had lied. The prisoner must go free; if he is burnt to-morrow, the sin will be on my soul for ever. For my sake, for justice sake, pardon him. He is innocent!"

Lord Marbrack's eyes became like steel. Arnot's enchantment was even more potent than he hitherto had realised. How villainous he must be, when even from his dungeon he could cast on Mariota such a spell that she believed him guiltless.

Mariota saw the change in the Lord President's expression; and she took it to be the outward sign of scorn and contempt for herself.

"You do well to despise me," she said; "I made a false and wicked accusation. And more still am I accursed for letting the trial go on without one word of protest. I will not ask for mercy; I ask justice."

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“Justice will be executed on the prisoner to-morrow at sunrise,” said Lord Marbrack. “Gae hame to bed and sleep sound; for the spell’ll be broken as soon as the fire has consumed the warlock. Then you shall be free. Nae mair shall you be troubled by demon-hatched delusions.”

Mariota wrung her hands, and her whole body quivered.

“Sleep!” she said, “I shall never sleep again. The guilty do not sleep. Hear me, my cousin. I am not deluded; I am telling you the truth at last.”

Marbrack felt his heart harden afresh against the necromancer, who, even in chains, preserved such power.

“Mariota, dearie,” he said gently, but in his firmest tones; “ye ken ye mislikit yon fellow at the stairt; and gin ye defend him noo in his sins, ye gie ane ither proof—gin proof were needed—o’ his hell-black chairms and terrible deceitfulness.”

Mariota put her hand up to her throat; it seemed as if she could not breathe; and the room grew dim around her. But her eyes were tearless as she gazed back at the Judge, and strove to think of words by which it might be possible to convince him.

He was not cruel to her; not angry, not even hostile; he was still her kind old friend and kinsman. But he thought her crazy and bewitched. This she realised; and despair

would have engulfed her had she not been upheld by two of the strongest powers in the universe—courageous love and deep remorse.

Her personal fears had vanished; her shrinking from pain and dread of punishment had given place to absolute determination to save David, even if at the cost of dying in his place.

And the Judge read in her face the vital change, but he misread the inner working of her heart. The triumph of Truth over Calumny, the victory of self-sacrificing love over selfish longing were alike invisible to him; he saw only an insane obstinacy, a rooted obsession.

“What nauseous potion has old Cracken-thorpe been brewing ye?” he said, trying to speak soothingly. “Ye’re no in natural health, ma dearie, and a wumman gets dulefu’ when she’s ailing. But ye’ll be yer ain bonny sel’ the morn, an’ no fash Ludovick wi’ these fancies.”

Mariota stared at him. It was as if her mind and his were separated by an impassable gulf. The more she explained, the less he understood; and she felt her strength ebbing.

With one agonised effort, which was like tearing her spirit out of her body and holding it up quivering for him to look upon, she spoke again.

“Hear me. I love David Arnot; but he prizes ‘Ludovick’s little finger better than my

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whole soul and body ; so I thought if I could but break the friendship between him and Ludovick, he would turn to me. His loyalty to Ludovick stood like an iron wall to shut me out from joy ; and so in my misery I struck and smote—blindly, madly—at Ludovick's deep trust in David. Too well I succeeded in shattering it. The rest you know."

Lord Marbrack stood up, and looked down upon her pitifully.

"This is madness," he said ; "God grant ye to grow sane the morn. I shall wipe from oot ma memory every word that ye hae spoken this nicht. God protect ye ; puir lass, puir blinded victim."

Then Mariota broke into passionate sobbing, and the tears streamed down her face.

"Do not pity me," she said as soon as she could speak. "Condemn me ; but pity him. I thought I loved him ; because I craved to have him for myself ; all for myself ; because I believed he could give me radiant joy and gladness ; because I wanted him to take me away into the sunshine, I plotted and schemed. I called this love. But now I know. Love is quite otherwise ; love will die for the beloved one ; love is fearless and can pay the utmost price. Let me die ; let me die. Open the prison doors for him."

Lord Marbrack laid his hand on her shoulder.

"These are crazy words," he said.

"They are the truth," said Mariota; and she became all of a sudden strangely calm.

"I see," she said, "you hesitate; you will not admit the sentence was a mistake; you cannot take back your verdict in the face of the world. But there are other ways; prisoners can escape. You are all-powerful; so be merciful. Nay; rather be just."

Her voice rang out, and she rose to her feet: "Let me take him his freedom," she pleaded; "let me receive his forgiveness. And then do with me as you will. He has never loved me; nor will he. Till the end of the world and all through eternity I shall be desolate. But at least I would know that if I doomed him, I also saved him."

Lord Marbrack shook his head: "I'll tak' ye hame, puir lassie; and ne'er a word'll I breathe o' this to Ludovick. Dinna greet; the spell canna ootlast the nicht. The warlock's power dees wi' him."

"Warlock!" exclaimed Mariota. "If he be a warlock, why did he not smite his Judges? why not bewitch his guards and break his prison bars? Why stay to suffer and die a cruel death?"

"Nae doot," said Lord Marbrack, "nae doot he purposed so to escape, wi' the aid o' Satan. But worthy Maister McClorg has wrastled in prayer these mony days that God may prevent sic a miscarriage o' justice; and sae the prisoner each hour grows weaker.

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The Deil—his God—betrayed him, and forsakes him at the last, leaving his name to be a hissing and an abomination, and plunging his black soul in Hell.”

“Is this your last word?” asked Mariota.

She recognised that all her efforts had been foiled. Despair engulfed her.

Fear she had cast away some hours since; now hope was gone.

She seemed to herself so absolutely and infinitely bereaved that there remained no cause for further effort or emotion.

A dull numb calm came over her.

“Forgive me, cousin,” she said; “If I have been mad, I am mad no longer. I will go home.”

“There’s a guid lass,” said Lord Marbrack soothingly, as if to a child. “We’ll no speak o’ this necromancer ony mair. The nicht’s just a bad dream; and ye’ll be forgettin’ it the morn. God keep ye.”

So he spoke, patting her shoulder gently, for he had not believed one word of her self-accusation.

Every lawyer who had studied witchcraft had read of cases showing the potency of wizards’ spells to make innocent persons incriminate themselves.

Thank God this wizard would be burnt at sunrise; and henceforth enchained for ever in Hell, whence he could trouble the world no more.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CROWN OF THORNS

DAVID ARNOT lay wide open-eyed in the darkness. He was alone. As he was to die in the morning, his tormentors no longer had instructions to prevent his sleeping. But he had lost the power to sleep. Did the dead sleep, he wondered? No, surely not; they had passed from the dark night of visible life into the realm of the awakened spirit, God's kingdom of eternal sunrise.

"God——?"

David tried to feel the presence of a God of love and mercy; tried to look up beyond the anguish of betrayal, desolation, ruin, mockery of justice, up to the stars. But the night was starless, and the cruelty of man weighed on him so heavily that it seemed to blot out God. Was it possible that God had made man in His own image?

The night wore slowly onwards, each moment like an hour, each hour as an eternity of grief. "Where there is most power of feeling, there of martyrs is the greatest martyr," and David's broken body now troubled him less than his tortured soul; for there are

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limits to what flesh and blood can suffer, but in the infinite spirit there is room for infinite anguish.

It seemed to David that even when the time came for his soul to win release from his body, his sorrow would only deepen and widen ; for then, with the eyes of the spirit, he would see still more clearly the tragedy of the whole world : the age-long grief and misery, the obstinate blindness, the wreckage and the chaos which men call " life."

For himself, he had one wish ; to see Ludovick ; to tell him that he forgave, to ask him why and how such strange and terrible delusions could have possessed him and have shut out trust and friendship ?

But Ludovick had refused to come ; and now, until the Day of Judgment, Ludovick would remain deluded ; his heart barred resolutely against this changeless affection which neither death nor time nor even this cruelty could extinguish.

To a steadfast and consistent nature, inconstancy is not comprehensible. The spirit may writhe under the blow, the heart may break, the brain may reel ; God Himself may seem to have turned His face away ; but still the mystery is insoluble. How can affection and friendship die ? Are they not immortal ? Are they not God's gift to man, to show him how his spirit came from afar and must return at last to his true home, the realm where there is neither

grief nor shadow nor confusion, but sublimest harmony and deathless love in the presence of God?

David's mind groped in the darkness; and for the thousandth time he strove to fathom why Ludovick could have turned against him. That he felt no anger, only a piercing sorrow at the desertion and treachery of the being whose life and welfare had been dearest to him, did not appear to him remarkable. He had given to Ludovick a love passing the love of woman; Ludovick had been more to him than a brother; for Ludovick's happiness and healing he had toiled, prayed, yearned; and he had never failed him, even in utmost stress. So how could Ludovick distrust him?

The wind outside screamed in the darkness, blew fiercely through the iron bars of the one window, and then shrieked and fainted away.

But a sobbing sound still came up from under the window: sobs despairing and convulsive.

Involuntarily his eyes filled with tears. Some deserted woman, some forlorn outcast, he thought; and his heart was flooded with pity.

It seemed to him as if his narrow cell grew immeasurably vast, and that around him thronged a multitude of quivering souls, all crying out for mercy, love, compassion; deliverance from the fetters of cruelty, jealousy, tragic passion, and more bitter coldness:

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deliverance from ill-starred love and savage hate.

So profound their yearning, so hopeless their misery, that David's own grief poured itself into this unfathomable sea of grief and mingled with it, until he seemed one with all the suffering of every breaking heart in the universe.

Then his mortal brain could bear no more; a cord seemed to snap within him, and merciful oblivion wrapped him round.

Feeble rays of dawn came flickering between the iron bars.

David opened his eyes. There was a hush all round him. No traffic was stirring outside; no breath of wind; no human voice.

But while he swooned and slept, he had heard voices and music. The music echoed even now in his heart, though his brain kept no remembrance of it. He strove to recall the melody. It had been a triumphal march, with silver-throated clarions; and he had heard the fluttering of many wings, and had seen the light which streamed from glorious beings clad in armour.

He strove to move his cramped twisted limbs; and it was as if a current of life poured into every vein. Had he been fighting? O, to die in battle; to go down sword in hand, in conflict against tangible odds! What matter whether winning or losing. The soldier

who dies nobly in a fair fight is ever victor; even if he fight on what seem the conquered side, he has not surrendered. But to die as a criminal, to die derided and reviled, betrayed and scorned, in terrible loneliness amid a furious brutal crowd; to die unloved, his best friend turning his face away, claiming "God" as sanctifying this cruelty—the horror of such a fate came over him afresh with a poignancy compared to which his former sufferings seemed to fade into mist.

"Have I not loved and pitied sorrowing souls; have I not toiled and striven ceaselessly to bring healing and comfort? In what have I sinned?"

Such was the cry of his heart.

Again silence encircled him.

This silence deepened and widened. He closed his eyes; he could hear no human sound. But he became aware that he was not alone.

Whether he slept or wakened then he did not know; but, be it a dream or an awakening, he found himself standing out of doors, looking down with scorn and disgust into a seething crowd which shrieked, mocked and gibbered at a prisoner.

Contemptuous loathing of the crowd surged up like a great wave in his breast. He felt the utmost distaste for his own position. To keep order among these creatures, with only a few soldiers at his back to guard the prisoner—

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such was his task ; and he frowned to hear the shouts of the rabble in some foreign language. What were they saying ? It seemed to be an execution.

They were jeering at the victim. Their words he struggled to distinguish ; and as he struggled he awakened, faint and giddy.

Where was he ? Where had he been ?

Now he knew. He was a prisoner ; he was to be burnt at the stake that day, denounced by his dearest friend ; betrayed and hounded down, because he had striven to spend himself in toil for a world which neither understood nor thanked him.

But what had he dreamt ? He had been on guard at an execution ; where had it been ? What were the voices ? His tired brain groped as if in darkness. Then a great awe and horror swept over him ; for he knew in a flash what words the jeering voices spoke in vilest mockery of the captive : “ If thou art the Son of God, come down from the Cross and save thyself.”

Then at last, in a torrent of overwhelming revelation there came upon him what he had always sought and never before had found : the power to realise—so far as a mortal soul and mind can comprehend—the loneliness and suffering of Christ, who had left the joy of Heaven and descended to the prison-house of flesh, in sublime compassion for a fallen and alienated race. He who came in purest love,

foreknowing He would be crucified by blackest hate ; He who suffered betrayal and desertion, and was scorned by those He came to save.

David Arnot opened his eyes ; his body was in a prison cell in Edinburgh ; but his spirit felt the heritage of an immeasurable past, an eternal future ; and he understood how that eternal future,—with all its hope of mercy and redemption, its promise of long-forgotten joy and noble strength to be restored,—had been hastened for the rebellious human race through that Divine Love which willingly endured the utmost anguish, the utmost humiliation. “ Nails had not held the Son of God nailed and fastened to the Cross, had Love not held Him.”

David had dimly known this from boyhood ; but at last he felt and saw it ; and all his own most poignant anguish, his own acute and fiery grief were transmuted into deepest awe and wonder.

Then came a flash of piercing emotion almost like remorse. “ Christ, my Lord,” he said in his heart, “ Thou wert mocked, Thou wert sold by treachery, Thou wert hated and reviled ; and who am I that I should deem it my right to be beloved and honoured ? ”

Though his body lay prone and helpless, his spirit seemed to bow down then before a radiant and glorious presence, and his heart

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was his King, his Leader, his unchanging Friend,—the Divine Victim who was also the predestined Conqueror.

As to an earthly and visible monarch he spoke, “A boon, great King and Victor; forgiveness for Ludovick; forgiveness for all.”

And then again his soul was carried far away beyond earth; his mortal brain knew nothing more, till a key grated harshly in the lock.

The warder stood in the doorway, and said exultantly in loud rasping tones, “Spawn o’ Satan, cam’ awa’! Cam’ awa’. Ca’ as ye may on yer Maister, he’ll no deleeve ye. God curse ye!”

CHAPTER XXX

SACRIFICE

WHEN Mariota had come forth defeated from her final effort to win tardy justice through Lord Marbrack, she had refused his offer to escort her home, saying she had her escort waiting. But she had come alone, and alone she stumbled blindly along the middle of the street; sharp gusts of wind cutting through her plaid, her knees trembling beneath her, and her heart sinking with that absolute despair which seems to extinguish the last flicker of the spirit's life.

Yet this seeming death is not the prelude to a merciful oblivion; rather it is the beginning of a wider, more intense, more poignant power of suffering.

Mariota made her way slowly down the hill towards the Tolbooth. She had no hope that she might be admitted; but even to stand outside,—though prison bars and pitiless walls rose up between her and the being she so deeply loved and unwittingly had betrayed,—this was all the comfort left.

The street seemed endless; the wind buffeted and beat on her aching body; she staggered several times, and nearly fell.

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At last she stood beneath the horn lantern which flickered over the Tolbooth door ; and leaning against the grimy walls, she broke into a sudden passion of weeping. So spent and weak it left her that she sank on her knees ; and, resting her head against the wall, she believed that her life was swooning to death.

Then a hand—rough but not unkind—gripped her by the shoulder.

“This is yer first nicht i’ the streets ?” said a woman’s voice.

“Yes,” answered Mariota, not heeding what had been said.

“Dinna greet sae sair,” said the woman ; “it’s no sae bad when yer used tae ’t.”

Mariota rose unsteadily to her feet ; the first faint gleams of dawn were fighting with the darkness ; the wind had dropped, and all was silent. It might almost have been a city of the dead.

She stared at the woman ; a thin and famished creature, with a weather-beaten face, the wreck of what had once been beauty.

The woman’s eyes were blue, and as she looked at Mariota they softened.

“You seem kind,” said Mariota ; “do you love any man ?”

“Dinna be a fule,” said the woman, and her face hardened. “The meenisters tell that God made man ; but I’m thinking ’twas the Deil. Pit luv awa’ ; it’s the Deil’s snare.”

Mariota looked at her ; and then looked back at the Tolbooth walls.

"Yer mon,—in prison?" asked the woman.

"Yes," said Mariota in a weary voice ; "he is to die at daybreak."

Another woman slid out of the dark shadows, laughing mirthlessly.

"There's as guid fish in the sea as cam' oot o' the sea," she said ; and laughed again.

Mariota shuddered ; and once more the sudden gusty wind came beating upon her. She drew her plaid closer ; and the two women moved away and left her to herself.

She tried to think. Past, present, future,—what were they? One long misery of hopelessness.

Ludovick? What was he? A victim like herself ; ground down under the relentless heel of a destiny the ministers called "God" ; a torturer, a ruthless inquisitor. And not even death would bring release ; for, alas, souls had been created immortal. No sleep, peace, or rest beyond the grave. No hope,—but hell on earth, and worse hell to come.

In a few hours David would be dead. Surely when he was dead he would intercede with God ; surely David would be merciful and pitiful. And yet why should he be? Who was there in Scotland who had shown him any gratitude or mercy?

In a tempest of frightful anguish Mariota

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beat her hands against the wall. "O, David, David," she sobbed.

Her voice broke; and her heart seemed pierced as if by a sword, which smote and smote again, and yet did not slay, but rather infused a cruel force which kept her alive that she might face more torment.

Voices; footsteps; a hooting laugh, a curse; the clatter of horses' hoofs.

The town was awakening. Pale gleams of light were struggling through the greyness of early morning; and still Mariota stood outside the Tolbooth.

By degrees a crowd collected, and, as the mist lightened and the day grew clearer, the crowd was seen to be extended down to the Abbey on the one hand, and up even to the Castle Hill on the other.

Mariota, wrapped in her plaid, was pushed and jostled by foul-smelling and loud-voiced men, and almost crushed against the wall.

Then she heard the voice of the blue-eyed woman who had spoken kindly to her during the night:

"The warlock'll be brought oot soon," she said; "a young warlock, braw and bonnie. But he witched the Leddy Rusco's bairn and kilt it. There's a malison on a' that hoose o' Rusco; nae guid comes tae ony o' the name."

Mariota gazed blankly; the words hardly

reached her brain, for in one moment she had been petrified with terror. In the crowd, not seven yards away from her, she saw the red hair and the wolfish smile of Mungo McKerlie.

The woman standing beside her saw him too. "Curse him," she said; "curse him. 'Twas he brought me tae this."

And Mariota trembled.

Then a grating sound smote on her consciousness,—a clang, and an expectant shout.

The Tolbooth door had swung back on its creaking hinges; the warders had come out. In their midst, bound and carried in a wooden chair, was David Arnot.

The crowd gave a murmur, rising to a roar, as he was brought into the middle of the muddy street and hoisted on to a high cart whence all could see him plainly.

The crowd surged between Mariota and the victim; her eyes seemed blinded.

The roar sank back to a murmur again; but she heard the voice of Mungo McKerlie, rising above all the shuffling noises:

"Warlock! Necromancer! Murderer! Curse him; stone him!"

As these words cut across the morning, David's eyes met the eyes of his old adversary who had raised the cry against him long ago in the sunlit streets of Padua. David then had smarted with indignation and an inward shrinking horror; a premonition of disaster. But now he could gaze steadily back into those

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greenish eyes,—into them, and away and beyond.

In the crowd he saw one whom he had thought never to see again in waking life. Not Ludovick,—alas, not Ludovick,—but Lady Rusco. Her eyes sought his, and silently sent him the imploring entreaty, “Forgive, forgive.”

Swift as a lightning flash, his soul saw into that soul and read in it a depth of horror so tumultuous that his heart ached with pity.

Unaware that she had spoken even one word against him, unsuspecting the true reason of her grief, yet her immeasurable sorrow reached him.

The crowd was howling. Stones were thrown ; and lumps of mud and filth.

A jagged stone struck David’s brow. For an instant he feared he was swooning ; but then, it seemed to him, invisible arms upheld him ; and a deep compassion from some eternal source of changeless love surged up in his breast. Alas for the mortal race,—so harsh, so ugly, so full of hate, so blinded, so bewildered. And alas for Lady Rusco, with her passionate heart, her tempest-driven spirit.

Another stone hit David sharply ; and yet another.

Mariota felt each of these stones as if they lacerated her soul.

The end was fast approaching ; but, before the end, the power of speech came back to her.

“Forgive, forgive !”

David Arnot

Her cry rang out with the strength of unconquerable love and deepest despair.

Then she heard his voice for the last time ; his beloved voice, strong, resonant, unconquered. " Father, forgive them ; they know not what they do."

" Blasphemy," shouted Mungo McKerlie, " blasphemy ! The warlock dares to profane the words of Christ. Christ blast him ! Curse him ; curse him ! "

And so, amidst howls of scorn and execration, David Arnot, Physician and Chirurgeon, was carried to his doom.

EPILOGUE

“Like as a bird that hath beene long encaged, then chants most merrily when she gets loose into the open ayre ; Or as a sicke man, that hath wearily tossed and turned himselfe in his bed all the dull night long, is comforted at the approach of daybreake. . . . Or as a prisoner, that feeles his chaines heavie upon him, longs for releasement,—so will it be with thy Soul. . . .”—*Henry, Earl of Manchester*, “*Contemplatio Mortis et Immortalitatis*” (1631).

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DAWN

It was the hour before dawn. A deep silence brooded over Rusco Castle ; not the silence of peace and repose, but that breathless hush which awes, subdues, almost terrifies ; a hush which seems more menacing than any external storm or tempest.

As night wore on, Ludovick, watching by his wife's bedside, felt such heavy loneliness of spirit, such crushing desolation, that he would have prayed for death, were it not that he dreaded worse misery hereafter.

It was now ten months since David Arnot had been tried, condemned, and burnt as a necromancer ; and since that fatal morning,—the morning before Christmas,—Rusco, in his waking hours, had not known one gleam of happiness. No sooner had he heard the yells of the mob against David than a terrible doubt of the justice of the sentence had assailed him.

As he stood by the window of his house in the Canongate and looked out and down on the seething mass of the shrieking and cursing populace, he had seen raised high in their

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midst—with pale proud face bleeding from the jagged cut of a stone—David, the friend he had loved, trusted and revered beyond any human being ; David whom he doubted and denounced ; David, from whom none had ever known an ungenerous deed, nor heard a discourteous word ; David, who uttered no reproaches, no recriminations ; and whose dignity and majesty of bearing had caused Lord Marbrack to liken him to a fallen angel.

As Ludovick thus for the last time looked on David, a craven terror gripped him lest his own soul should be consumed in undying fire, because, even against his will, he still felt a yearning affection for this man whom the law and the Church declared accursed beyond hope of salvation.

Ludovick trembled then, and sickened with horror ; and at that very moment the prisoner's face had been turned upwards, his eyes seeking the windows of Rusco's house.

His gaze for one instant met the gaze of Rusco, who stood petrified with fear.

The scene rose again now. In the stillness Ludovick seemed to hear the howls of the angry people. In the darkness—illuminated only by one small lamp hanging on silver chains—he could again see those eyes, eloquent with unchanging love, lofty grief, unquenchable valour.

In that moment, when David looked up, something seemed to snap in Ludovick's

brain ; and he had fallen backwards, swooning into a frightful darkness.

When he had returned to consciousness, it was to learn that Mungo McKerlie, descrying Mariota in the street among the populace, had rescued her from being crushed to death when she was fainting.

McKerlie had given her into the care of a servant ; and then hurried back into the crowd which thronged to witness the warlock's death.

For three days and nights Mariota neither spoke nor stirred ; and, ever since, she had been a shadow of her former self. She was gentle, docile, submissive ; but she seldom spoke, and there was no light in her eyes. It was supposed that her mind was almost unhinged by grief for the loss of her baby.

Of Doctor Arnot she never uttered one word ; and Ludovick kept to himself all his doubts and fears, and his involuntary remorse, which he thought might startle or shock her.

And now, for several weeks, she had lain ill with a slow wasting fever ; and Ludovick's heart sank with dread lest her health were hopelessly shattered.

Her bright hair had lost its brilliance ; so thin were her hand and arm outstretched over the coverlet that her husband could scarcely endure to see the wreck of that glowing vitality which used to be so characteristic of her beauty. Her face and figure were sadly

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changed since the time when he had likened her to "the heathen Venus"; but never had she been more utterly and entirely precious in his eyes than she was now.

He stirred uneasily; his limbs ached with keeping still so long. As he stirred, her eyelids fluttered, and then drooped again. She gave a little sigh and wakened.

"My Love," he said, "I am here."

"Is it dawn yet?" she asked in a faint voice, scarcely above a whisper. "Draw the curtains."

He rose to obey her; and as he pulled back the heavy tapestry which covered the windows, he saw the first pale gleam of daybreak.

"It is almost morning," he said gently; "and you are better."

"Ludovick," said Mariota; "You have been kind to me; much kinder than I to you. When you were ill, I was impatient. Since I have been ill, you have been all tenderness and goodness. I wish——"

She had been about to say she wished he could have been her brother; for thus she could have loved him. But it seemed wanton cruelty to tell him she had never loved him.

His care for her, his devotion—which had waxed and not waned with the waning of her beauty—touched her and made her sad at having deceived him. She felt deep regret, even remorse, that she was not able to give him the passionate love for which he yearned,

even as she erstwhile had hungered for the love of David.

"Ludovick," she said, "I have been dreaming to-night of David Arnot. I saw him; not surrounded with flames of fire but with a wonderful golden light. His face was as the face of a warrior-angel."

Ludovick sank on his knees beside her bed but he was unable to speak. When he looked up, his eyes were brimming over with tears.

"Listen," said Mariota. "We have sinned a great sin; we betrayed to death a man who was innocent,—more than innocent. We deserve eternal doom. I for my part merit no pity. But David intercedes for us; David forgives. And David's God is like unto David,—compassionate, merciful, knowing all our remorse, all our grief."

Ludovick's frame was rent with sobs. "Is it possible that he forgives? Is it possible? O David, David!"

Mariota stretched out her hand and laid it on her husband's bowed head. It was the first real caress she had ever voluntarily offered.

"Ludovick," she said, "Look up; look at the sky. See, the dawn. Draw back the curtains further."

He raised himself, and going again to the window he looked out. The sky was flecked with rose colour, and a faint breath of wind was stirring the branches of the trees.

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The oppressive hush had lifted.

In the same moment it seemed as if the eyes of his soul were opened.

"My beloved," he said, "do not say 'we' have sinned. It is I,—I who should bear all the blame. You are innocent."

Mariota instinctively turned her face away; but then resolutely faced him.

"No," she said, "it is I who am guilty; I who have to confess that which will appal you."

Again there came upon Ludovick the shattering sense of terror. Just as happiness had seemed to be coming with the dawn, he felt as if an unending night of desolation were about to descend upon his spirit.

Mariota, overmastered by intense longing to unburden herself of her own remorse, felt that she could no longer play a part, no longer deceive. And so she spoke:

"Hearken, and forgive," she said. "My poor Ludovick. Hear the truth at last. I have never loved you. But I have loved David to madness; and I told him I loved him."

Ludovick staggered and almost fell; his face was ashen.

"And he?" he said. "And he?"

"Never for one moment did he love me; never did he waver in his loyalty to you. He told me that what I thought love was 'only a dream.' He was stern, terrible in his coldness; and yet noble."

Ludovick put one hand up to his head ; his brain was reeling ; all that was left of his world had fallen into chaos. The power of speech had gone from him ; old age had smitten him in a single moment.

Then, without words or looking at Mariota, like one moving blindly in his sleep, he opened the door.

Mariota, weak as she was, raised herself in bed : " Ludovick, do not leave me."

He paused, hesitated ; shut the door ; returned ; and stood near her.

Still he did not speak ; but in newborn sympathy for him she realised that he was suffering even as she had suffered that terrible night when David rejected her love.

Her eyes filled with tears, and she held out both her hands.

But he did not touch her. He stood back.

" Mariota," he said slowly, " I claim nothing more. I have loved you, and you only ; I will love no other woman. But your words pierce even into my childhood. Past, present, future, all are slain by this one stroke ; and from your hand."

He raised his head ; and for the first time Mariota saw in him dignity and courage.

It was as if sudden and absolute despair, in robbing him of all human joy, had also swept away everything wavering, petty, or trivial. He who used to chafe and grumble even at

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slight physical pain, now faced the wreck of all his hopes with a strange stern calm.

Mariota gazed up at him imploringly, and clasped her hands in supplication.

“Yes,” he said, “I forgive,—even as I hope for David’s forgiveness at the Last Day. But the doom I dreaded has come upon me. Childless and the last of my race I shall go down to the grave. This is the end; the fulfilment of the curse.”

Then Mariota, realising at last the prolonged torment he had endured, felt an overmastering pity for him; a pity which swept away every thought of self.

In that moment she would have poured out her life-blood if she could have healed the wounds she had inflicted. Her husband in his extremity of grief was exercising a self-control which won at last her respect and admiration.

She held out her hands again.

“Oh, Ludovick, Ludovick,” she said; “can you not understand what I mean by my confession? Can you not see that I am ready to atone? Can you not realise that the dark night is past? To-day sees the dawn of a new life for us both. If you, who are human, can forgive me, if David can forgive us both,—cannot God forgive?”

Her voice failed and faltered; for though her words were hopeful, she already had begun to wonder whether she could face all the consequences of such words.

Yet she strove not to flinch.

"Ludovick," she said, "the old love you thought I felt for you was a thing only of your fond fancy ; in my heart it had no roots. But the new love——"

Her eyes overflowed with tears ; she trembled and shivered.

Ludovick did not speak or stir. He felt as if he had died and come back from the dead ; and as if neither on earth nor even in Heaven could there be aught but misery and breaking of hearts. And with his sudden clearer vision he was aware that Mariota's "new love" was only a great pity.

At last he compelled himself to speak :

"How can you, who have loved David, ever love me ? It is not possible. Think of me as your friend, your kinsman, your protector ; and I pray God I may never fail you. But do not speak of love. From that dream I have awakened. Do not bid me dream again."

His voice was not harsh or stern, but low, even-toned, and deeply sorrowful ; the voice of one who has been so heavily stricken that he has lost power to credit any possibility of joy.

Mariota made one last desperate effort. Raising herself on her pillows, she stretched out her thin arms towards the window.

"Look, Ludovick," she said ; "is there no message of hope in that rose and golden sky ? See, see—The sunrise !"

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Then she fell back, utterly exhausted.

And he knelt down beside her, and strove to pray ; but the springs of hope seemed broken in him. Not even she, he thought, could charm them to life again.

CHAPTER XXXII

“ GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS— ”

THE May sunshine was bathing Padua in its lavish radiance ; the fountains twinkled and sparkled in the gardens of the Cavalli Palace ; a soft breeze fanned the tall Madonna lilies, and here and there a butterfly flitted to and fro.

From the town came sounds of horses' hoofs clattering on cobble stones, the rumbling of wheels, the barking of dogs, and the shrill voice of a flower girl.

Within the palace,—in a room shaded from the sun and lined on the north side with rare and ancient books locked in chests and caskets—sat two men facing each other. One was the Prince Cavalli's uncle, Messer Ilario, the renowned sage and physician ; the other was Gorsane of Rusco.

They had been alone together for the space of an hour ; Rusco had spoken ; the Master had listened.

Cavalli's calm aged face—lighted up by piercing eyes, the keenness of which no passage of time seemed able to diminish,—appeared to Rusco stern and awe-inspiring in its high

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impersonal dignity. Could such a man as this, master of Nature's secrets, throned in majestic tranquillity, far above storm or passion, understand the despair uncovered before his steady gaze? The gulf between Cavalli and himself was too wide, Ludovick thought; and already he almost repented having spoken, though to speak the whole truth had eased the pressure on his brain.

Messer Ilario's voice was clear and gentle, but he spoke with a strength which was at the same moment bracing and compassionate.

“ Miserable indeed were we if this dark and tortuous life were all. But we are exiles on earth; and these cravings for inextinguishable love,—the very intensity of your grief, the yearning, the heartbreak,—these are memories of a long-forgotten state, when souls were divine, before by sin they were dragged down and prisoned in flesh.”

Rusco stared; for though Messer Cavalli spoke in English, yet his words were unexpected, and, to Rusco's cramped intellect, confusing.

“ I know,” he replied, “ that churchmen tell us we are born in sin; but how can a babe sin before it come to birth in the body?”

“ “ Did this man sin, or his parents, that he was born blind?” ” quoted Cavalli; and then, after a pause, he stretched out one long slender hand with an eloquent gesture and fixed his

eyes even more intently on Rusco's haggard and weary face.

"God, the Supreme King," he said, "loves so entirely the creatures He created that He asked from them no compelled worship, no enforced obedience, but rather a willing devotion. And thus, even from the highest Heavens, He gave them liberty,—free will. And some used it but to mutiny against Him to Whose Divine Love they owed their being."

Rusco stirred uneasily in his chair, and looked away from Cavalli's searching eyes :

"Do you mean," he said slowly, "that you think I myself was one of those mutinous ones who followed Lucifer on that awful day when there was war in Heaven?"

"I speak not of you alone," Cavalli answered ; "How and when you fell, or I, none on earth can tell you. There were many grades of spirits ; many degrees of guilt. Some, who fell not with Lucifer, yet fell afterwards ; when as messengers of God they were sent to earth to uplift, rescue, and illuminate a lower race. Alas, 'The Sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair.' Sons of God, whose eternal counterparts awaited them in the realms of Light,—spirits of pure love and heavenly beauty to whom they had vowed fidelity,—these they forgot beneath the dark enchantments of the daughters of men, through whose

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ignorance and blind desire the demoniac power had plotted to ensnare angelic spirits ; spirits which, had they not fallen, might have led many a struggling soul upwards to Heaven. Verily, there is much bitter fruit of sorrow, many a tragedy to-day, many a heart-break, which has its roots back in those ages before the Flood ; and mayhap in still remoter ages.”

Ludovick stared at his host in speechless amazement. He put his hand to his head, which was throbbing and burning.

Cavalli rose stiffly from his throne-like chair, and moved slowly across to a cabinet which he unlocked with a silver key.

Then he took out a phial of Venetian glass, and poured a sparkling white liquid into a crystal goblet.

“ Drink this,” he commanded.

“ If it is the elixir of life, give me none of it,” said Ludovick ; “ rather would I have mandragora or poppyseed. If I may not yet win death, let me woo Sleep ; Death’s sister.”

But Cavalli held out the goblet, and Ludovick despite his protest, drained it obediently. It sent a current of strength into his veins.

“ Pardon and bear with me if I do not understand your meaning,” he said more humbly. “ I have torn my very soul out and laid it naked before you. I have told you how I loved

David, and betrayed him, thinking thereby to propitiate a jealous God. I have told you how I learnt that my wife's heart had never been mine; and how even when I believed her nearest to me, her every thought was for another. I have told you how my child was born only to die. I have told you how after David's cruel death, my wife sank and pined and drooped; and how she offered me, towards the end, her pity and tardy love; then faded out of life. After so many sorrows, I have lost power to hope that joy or love can ever be mine here or hereafter. And in reply you speak of the days before the Flood, and tell me that souls being destined to an undying future have also an immeasurable past. But in this I find no comfort."

Messer Cavalli paused a moment before replying; and to Ludovick, with a mind swaying this way and that,—bewildered, darkened and chaotic,—the pause appeared to denote an inability to answer.

"If you had looked upon David's face as he went to his doom, if you had seen my wife die, you would understand," he said. "But you sit apart, aloof from human passion. How can you know?"

Cavalli drew himself up; and though even his austerity was but a deeper pity, he seemed to Ludovick rebuking:

"Alas," he said, "do you deem I have lived all my eighty years thus? Am I not man?"

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Was I not once young ? Immeasurably bitter the grief of my early manhood ; for the woman I loved and worshipped,—in whose face I seemed to behold reflected the purity of Heaven,—comprehended me not ; and the more high I throned her in deep and reverent devotion, the more she inly recoiled from me. She left me at last, for the sake of one whose name was a byword for adulteries and heartless lusts. I who worshipped her as a Queen, she disdained ; he who trampled on her and enslaved her, she adored. And all this happened in the eyes of the world, which mocked and derided me in that my angel-goddess, whom I had sung as a Queen of perfect Love and angelic beauty, was shown to have the soul of a slave.”

In sheer amazement, Ludovick was silent.

“ This befel more than fifty years since,” said Messer Cavalli ; “ but I shall bear the scar to the end of time,—even until the Last Day, when by the mercy of God I shall regain my True Love ; lost to me in remote ages ; lost by my own act, but faithful despite my own infidelity.”

Ludovick was more and more astonished. He remembered among his grandfather’s books a long epic written by an exile who had beheld Purgatory, Hell, and Heaven while still in the body, and who laboured to awaken the world by describing both the pains of Hell and the radiance of Heaven.

But this poem, in its strange tongue, had been difficult as well as disquieting to him ; and he remembered locking it away where Mariota could not find it.

He pondered. Though he had besought Cavalli to take him as a pupil, yet his tired mind could only walk stumblingly after the Master.

" But David," he said, " David,—whom no woman could tempt, no torture break, no cruelty embitter,—that I his friend should have been turned against him, that through me he should have met such a terrible fate ; surely this cries to Heaven for vengeance. Surely I am accursed ! "

Across Cavalli's face—noble in the strength of sorrows heroically conquered, knowledge gained through anguish,—there passed a shadow of grief which not even his self-control could entirely conceal.

" David," he said, " was the only one of all my pupils in whom I felt that spiritual kinship which is far more potent than any relationship of blood. The barriers of age, race, language, did not part us. To him I destined the heritage of my powers, my wealth, and much of my dearly-bought wisdom ; and I hoped and believed he would surpass me. In him I found the steadfast nobility and high impersonal aspiration I had fruitlessly sought in others. In each other there was alloy : thirst for worldly glory, desire to sway men not for

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men’s good but for the delights of renown and authority ; or else the taint of inconstancy and weakness, the white wings of ecstasy soiled by the mud of selfish passion. In none save David was the soul tempered and prepared for what I could have given.”

“ Wherefore did he leave you ? ” asked Ludovick.

“ Because that Scotsman who cried out upon him as a necromancer, revealed to him thereby in a flash the darkness of Scotland.

“ Even as a lively flame and burning torch, which is the more needed the more dark the night, went David to his work of pity. And I, heavy with premonition of his doom, said no word to dissuade him.”

Ludovick groaned.

“ It is too late for me to atone,—too late, too late. O my God ! ”

“ Not so,” said Cavalli, vigorously. “ Not so. Say not ‘ It is too late.’ Say ‘ It is the destined hour.’ ‘ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’ Did Christ die in vain ? Do the soldiers of Christ fight or die in vain ? By the eternal majesty of God, I vow there is no drop of heroic blood, no pitiful thought, no compassionate act, which shall be in vain. Not now the consummation ; not yet the visible triumph. But victory is assured. To doubt the final issue would be to doubt God ; and that way lies madness.”

Ludovick sighed. "Verily, there are nights when the spectre of Madness so haunts me that I fear lest I be possessed by it and shattered like a frail bark dashed on pitiless rocks."

"Nay," said Cavalli, "put fears behind you. By the Sword of Saint Michael, be a man. And what is man? A being who bears within him the Divine Life. In David Arnot that spark was a bright steady flame which no storm-wind of adversity could beat down. Even so should it be in each one of us. I do not say unto you 'Grieve not,' for our exile on earth is one long grief. I do not say to you 'Forget the dead,' for to forget is to be base and fickle. But I say that remorse should breed courage; pain give birth to valour."

The old man rose to his feet; and in his frail figure and aged face there was such dignity of spirit as Ludovick had never seen in any other, —excepting only David.

"The conflict has been age-long," said the Master. "The end is far; therefore do we the more need an undying aspiration, and resolute endurance. Believe me, the rending pain in your soul is not the shattering of your life on earth. Rather is it the birth-pang of a new strength, which shall carry you to heights you never could have ascended without passing first through the fiery ordeal of a sorrow sharper than death."

"But," said Ludovick, "not for myself only do I grieve; not only for my wrecked hopes

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and fruitless passion ; but for David’s name, dishonoured, branded, reviled ; his work brought to naught ; his ashes scattered to the four winds of Heaven.”

“ But his spirit set free,” said Cavalli ; “ for to such as die in martyrdom there is immediate glorious resurrection. Let us not lament for the extinction of David’s name. His name shall be raised again even after it is buried. Men yet unborn shall be inspired to follow in his footsteps ; giving all, asking nothing, loving the sorrowing, the stricken, and the sinful, with that sublime love which no mortal cruelty can kill, no disaster can shake.”

Ludovick sighed wearily. “ But when and where may we find Peace ? ”

“ Peace ? ” echoed Cavalli, and his voice—subdued as it was—seemed to carry within it the note of a spiritual trumpet :

“ When shall we find Peace ? When the battle is won ; when light has vanquished darkness, when love has conquered hate. Then—victorious—we may rest in honourable peace. Till then, let us ask of God not peace but courage.”

Ludovick sighed anew ; for his was ~~no~~ warrior spirit, and his life seemed to him broken beyond hope.

“ Be of good cheer,” said Cavalli. “ Though the victory be long delayed, though many thousand years stand between us and the final triumph of truth,—let us never falter. Say to

David Arnot

yourself even in the darkest hour, 'The shadows pass away ; the light is everlasting.' Slowly, painfully, but surely, one by one, we exiles shall at last win back to our lost home ; back to the world of Divine Light, the world of supreme Love."

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